



**FROM FR. PETE...**  
*Pope Francis declared August 6<sup>th</sup> as a day of prayer for the Chaldean Church in Iraq, which is*

*being suppressed by the soldiers of ISIS and other extremists threatening those not of a similar faith. I received a letter from Sr. Grace Henneberry OP (an alumnus of St. Patrick's) who asked if we would share a letters from the sisters in Iraq. With their letter, I have also included the article below which the sisters wrote in June 2014. Please continue to pray for those who suffer around the world, especially towards this cause for whom the Holy Father has asked us to direct our attention.*

**THE DOMINICAN SISTERS WHO STAY IN IRAQ**

*From the Dominican Sisters' - St. Catherine of Siena*  
[www.op.org/en/content/dominican-sisters-who-stay-iraq](http://www.op.org/en/content/dominican-sisters-who-stay-iraq)

Mosul's remaining Christians have cleared out, according to news reports, but CNEWA's partners on the ground, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, are staying put.

The sisters, who run our maternity clinic in Zerqa, Jordan, and whose various apostolates are supported thanks to our generous benefactors, are safe for now.

A report last week noted: Following the takeover of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul by Islamic extremists this week, an estimated 500,000 civilians poured out of the city, fleeing bullets and burning wreckage. Yet, in all the chaos, one group remains resolute in its determination to stay in Mosul: the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, a congregation of Iraqi sisters that has witnessed generation upon generation of war and carnage.

Sr. Donna Markham, former prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan, spoke with the sisters in Mosul by phone three days after the extremist group ISIS, also known as ISIL, took the city. They told her the militants had left

and were marching toward Baghdad, which they had promised to take next.

Still, the sisters are far from safe. In addition to reports that there is no electricity in post-siege Mosul and that water supplies are low, the sisters also face the burden of living in a region that has become increasingly hostile to Christians.

In 2004, we profiled these committed and courageous sisters, as they endured the US-led invasion and its aftermath: As war approached last spring most Iraqis sealed their windows and stored food and water. The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena also made special housing arrangements and collected necessities, but not for themselves.

As they had done 12 years earlier, the sisters prepared a safety net for the people of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul and surrounding villages, many of whom are still suffering from the fallout of the second war between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the United States.

Before the fighting began, the sisters went door-to-door collecting food, which they stored and then distributed during the war to those who came to the convent looking for help. They also distributed food and medicine purchased with help from CNEWA. The sisters offered refuge to all in village churches, particularly in Kerakush. There, Christians and Muslims slept together as bombs pounded nearby Mosul for several nights in a row, said Sister Shirine Hanoush from the motherhouse in Mosul, where she has served as a sister for 40 years.

"Christian and Muslim families would share the same space. Everyone would pray together," she said. People came from all over the country, knowing the northern villages were safer than the cities. "This was a very challenging experience for the sisters," said Sister Shirine, "but it has made us more devoted to our work and faith."



## A LETTER FROM THE DOMINICAN SISTERS MINISTERING IN IRAQ -AUGUST 8, 2014

Dear Sisters, Brothers and Friends,

... Events are happening so quickly here shocking everybody because of its brutality and cruelty. On the night of the Feast of Transfiguration shooting started after mid-night, and continued until noon of the next day. On the morning of the sixth of June many shells fell on Karakosh. Between 8:30 and 9:00 a shell fell on a house and it killed two boys (nine and five years old) who were playing in the garden; and it also killed a 37 year-old woman who was trying to pull water from the pipes. This caused many people to leave the town for their lives. On the afternoon almost all people who remained went out for the funeral of the victims at the church. Although atmosphere of the funeral was sad and calm, it was obvious that people were scared of something would happen.

On the seventh of August we gradually started to understand that the Peshmerga, who were supposed to protect Karakosh, were pulling out, leaving the town unprotected. Everybody was shocked because Kurdish government promised to defend Karakosh, and the other Christian towns. At the same time, ISIS started to get closer to Karakosh and the residents started to leave the town. As a community, in no time we were to prepare to leave; we took the least with us unaware of what to take and unable to comprehend what was really happening. There were thirty sisters who left Karakosh in three cars and two families accompanied us, as they had no place to go. Three Franciscan sisters came with us, too. When we left the convent, we were surprised to see a big number of people leaving the town on foot. Moreover, it was strange to see only very few guards at the checkpoint when we were leaving the town. We were not alone on this; other towns shared the same horror. Christians from fifteen villages among them (Karamles, Bartela, Bashiqa, Telkaif, Baqofa, Batnaya, Telusqif) were forced to leave their homes because ISIS was advancing. Our sisters also left their convents in these towns. In Telkaif, while a young man (Lugin) with a young priest were trying to help a lady who was not able to leave on her own; he was shot and killed by the ISIS.

Our exodus started at 11:30 p.m., and before that we decided to pray and have the Holy Communion so that if the ISIS entered the house, it will not be defiled. But on the last minute, we decided to leave one piece in the tabernacle praying it will protect the house and the town.

When we arrived to the intersession of Mosul-Erbil, we were shocked to see a huge mess of cars driving very chaotically to Erbil. The view was beyond describing, as words cannot fully capture it. Men, pregnant women, children, handicaps and elderly were moving toward Erbil. There were Christians, Muslims Shiites, Yezeds and Shabak; some people were on foot, some were riding trunks of pick-up, lorry trunks, and motorcycles.

There are three checkpoints to arrive in Erbil. It took us five hours, from mid-night to five o'clock, to pass the first one; we

reached the second one at seven o'clock and the third one at eight thirty. We arrived the convent at 9:30 exhausted emotionally, physically and mentally. What we saw was unbearable; people were suffering for no reason but because of their sect, religion and race. We felt like we were in a nightmare wishing that someone would waken us up or that when the sun comes out it will be all over. But it was not the case; we were actually living a hard reality. It usually takes an hour and 15 minutes to drive from Karakosh to Erbil, but the day before yesterday, it took us 10 hours. It was very hot that night, and because it was very crowded many cars were taking side routes. This caused

Upon arriving in Erbil, we saw a big number of people from doomed towns that we mentioned above; there were a lot of people in the streets in the heat of summer sun, with temperature rising over 113° waiting to find a place to stay. Many family welcomed people in their homes and churches but still so many people are staying in parks even in streets and under every tree for shading. These people are way more than Erbil can house, neither can the church meet their needs. We also learned that there were about a hundred people left in Karakosh who decided not to leave and we learned from them that the ISIS entered and took some houses as a center for them. They also walked in the street saying Muslim prayer "Allahu Akbar".

Since there was no room for all sisters who came from Karakosh and Bartela to stay in the convent, about half of us are staying in the Chaldean Seminary for which we are really grateful. At the same time, many families preferred to stay in the garden of the convent rather than staying in the street so we provided tents for them. Our sisters from other doomed towns also left their convents and headed to other Kurdish towns.

We cannot know what will happen or how long people will stay like this nor what the ISIS will do to our towns, nor if we will ever be able to get back home. Everything is so unclear. The situation is extremely difficult. For the time being people have some money to support themselves, no one knows how long they will endure with the little they have.

As for the safety, Erbil is a Kurdish city and most refugees are staying in, a Christian suburb protected by Peshmerga. It is hard for people to believe that even this city is safe that's why they are thinking more and more to leave the whole country.

You may ask what the world can do for us. We would say, stop the blood, stop the oppression, and stop violence. We are human beings here; stop making us target for your weapon. The world needs to stand as one to protect minority against the evil and injustice. People want to live normal life in peace and dignity. Please help us out to stop the evil.

Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena –Iraq



August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Dear All,

After eleven days, it feels like we are on the same day we left. Some people are still in the streets, others are still in the parks, and some take refuge in schools. People are desperate to find a place to stay; even construction sites, unfinished buildings, private event halls, and basements are inhabited. A lot of people are living in unfurnished apartments, and homes, with sinfully high prices. People in the houses are sleeping on the floor, because they cannot afford to buy furniture. Some were fortunate to find a place to stay with relatives, in houses overloaded with people. On top of everything, refugees are running out of money, as they cannot pull money from banks, neither can they find jobs to work.

The disaster is overwhelming, and we are unable to comprehend it all. Our church leaders assured us that the Kurdish army would protect us. But they pulled out suddenly, from several towns in the plain of Nineveh and we had to make a quick decision to leave. In no time, most people directed themselves to Erbil, the closest city in Kurdistan. The city is packed with people, more than 75,000 people fled to it. That is apart from people who went to other cities like Kirkuk, Zakho, Sulaimania and Akra.

There is enormous lack of supplements, food, water, clothes, medication, housing, and money. And Erbil cannot accommodate all these people. However, we are doing what we can. All sisters, who are able to work, leave every morning, until evening, trying to help people settle and provide some food, with the help of the church and refugee centres.

We cannot rely on the central government as it is in process of forming and it is unable to protect the minority. Additionally, so far it seems like there are no serious actions against the ISIS by the world government. People lost confidence in everything, in government, in Kurdish protection, in church, even in the international military forces. Therefore, 90% of people want to leave. However, that is not easy at all, as so many of them have no passports or travel documents. The other choice people have is to stay, but this is even more difficult. Winter is coming, people cannot stay in the street, their children need to go to school, and they need jobs for living.

We need to serve people and we would like you to help us with that. There are so many people in refugee centres, who are receiving nothing, and we would like to help them with food, medication, clothes and other things. To do that, we need financial help.

As for us, as a community, we left nineteen places of ours, which include convents, schools and orphanages. Moreover, we have learned that our convent and the orphanage we own in Bartila have been taken by the ISIS. Also, our convents in Mosul and in Tal Kaif were taken (including school and kindergarten).

Sisters are scattered everywhere and we need to gather, at least in two communities in Duhok and Ankawa. In Ankawa, we have a piece of land, and we are thinking of buying caravans. Things might improve, and we might be returning for a while, however, we do not think it will be safe in the future. That is why we would appreciate any kind of help you might be able to offer.

Thank you so very much, and please remember the Iraqis in your prayers.

Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena –Iraq.

## Help Support the Work of the Dominican Sisters Ministering in Iraq

If you would like to help the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena who minister to the Christians living in Iraq, please go to the following link:

<https://www.adriandominicans.org/Donate/index.html>.

When specifying where the donation should go, click "Other" and type on the line, "The Ministry in Iraq."

If you prefer to send a check, write the check out to Adrian Dominican Sisters and note that it is for Iraq. Please send the checks to:

Adrian Dominican Sisters  
Attn: Iraqi Relief  
1257 East Siena Heights Dr.  
Adrian, MI 49221-1755