

The Role of the Catholic Church in the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East-

Iraq and Syria

Since the onset of the Iraq War in 2003, the plight of refugees from the war have been a mainstream topic in media outlets throughout the world and are featured in our nightly TV stations and news media. When civil war in Syria erupted in 2011 the refugee situation compounded as droves of refugees from the war began seeking refuge wherever they were able to find a helping hand. The Catholic Church is deeply embedded in the Middle East; the Mother Church was established in Jerusalem.... Iraq and Syria are neighbors! The diocese of Jerusalem, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, consists of Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Cyprus.

Most Catholic parishes in Jordan are small and not affluent; some receive support from the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (LPJ) to subsidize school/parish expenses. Jordanian law prohibits the employment of refugees unless they have a work permit. A course of action taken by parishes is to 'adopt' a group of refugee families. A member of each family is selected to perform tasks around the parish on a daily basis; gardening, cleaning, etc., and compensated with a modest sum. Not enough to support a family, but assistance. As pointed out in the description provided by Sami El-Yousef, it helps maintain their dignity; they are proud people.

An example of assisting refugees is St. Mary's, Mother of the Church, in Marka, Jordan. Father Kahil Jaar is parish priest at the church. Marka Parish is located about 15 minutes outside of Amman and in 2017 Father Jaar's name topped the list of CNN heroes for sheltering persecuted Christians. Jomana Kardashian of CNN wrote the following article:

"In 2014 Jordanian churches opened their doors to Christian refugees from Northern Iraqi cities like Mosul that were being taken over by ISIS. Father Kahil Jaar never turned anyone away, no matter what

their faith. Three years later St. Mary's is still home for displaced Christians.... And Father Kahil helps house hundreds of other families outside the church". Jomana continues as follows, "I asked him how he does it. He says he gets his strength from the refugees who have been through so much and he says he will never turn anyone away, no matter where they are from or their religion". Father Kahil's added these words: *"I started receiving them, giving them shelter, protection, attention and most important, to give them love. I opened my church, my house, the school, everywhere."* Added note: As a child Father Kahil was a Palestinian refugee from Bethlehem, he knows what it is like to be a refugee.



Father Kahil Jaar

Queen of Peace Parish, New Zarka- Refugees

Father Hani Polus Jameel is parish priest of Queen of Peace Parish and a native of Iraq, and relates well to the suffering, privations, and anguish of refugees and the plight of the Iraqi people. "The families of my eight brothers and my elderly parents (my father is 100 years old) were forced to leave Qaraqosh (Iraq) suddenly at night, in the course of a few hours, together with thousands of other people they set off for Kurdistan, (northeastern Iraqi) some by car, some by foot". Father Hani added, "refugees would love to return to their villages, but fear prevails, and they seek, in every way, to reach other countries".

In 2013 Father Hani submitted a proposal to obtain funds for refugee relief to various institutions. The Italian Episcopal Conference responded, and their funds provided assistance for 14,000 refugees, mostly

Syrians. Subsequently, with funds provided by NGO Manos Unidas, a Spanish charitable foundation, Father Hani initiated a second projects, which supported 12,000 refugees, mostly Iraqis.

Father Hani indicated for many Syrian Muslims, we were the first Christians they met personally; more than once they said they were surprised by our concern, and they confessed they did not believe Christians were like this. Now they respect us and love us; we are pleased.

Father Hani is currently seeking organizations to assist financially so they will be able to continue their work on behalf of refugees.

Refugee families being sheltered by Catholic parishes in Jordan





“Home is where the heart is”



Visitor from U.S.A visiting with refugees from Iraq