

# one

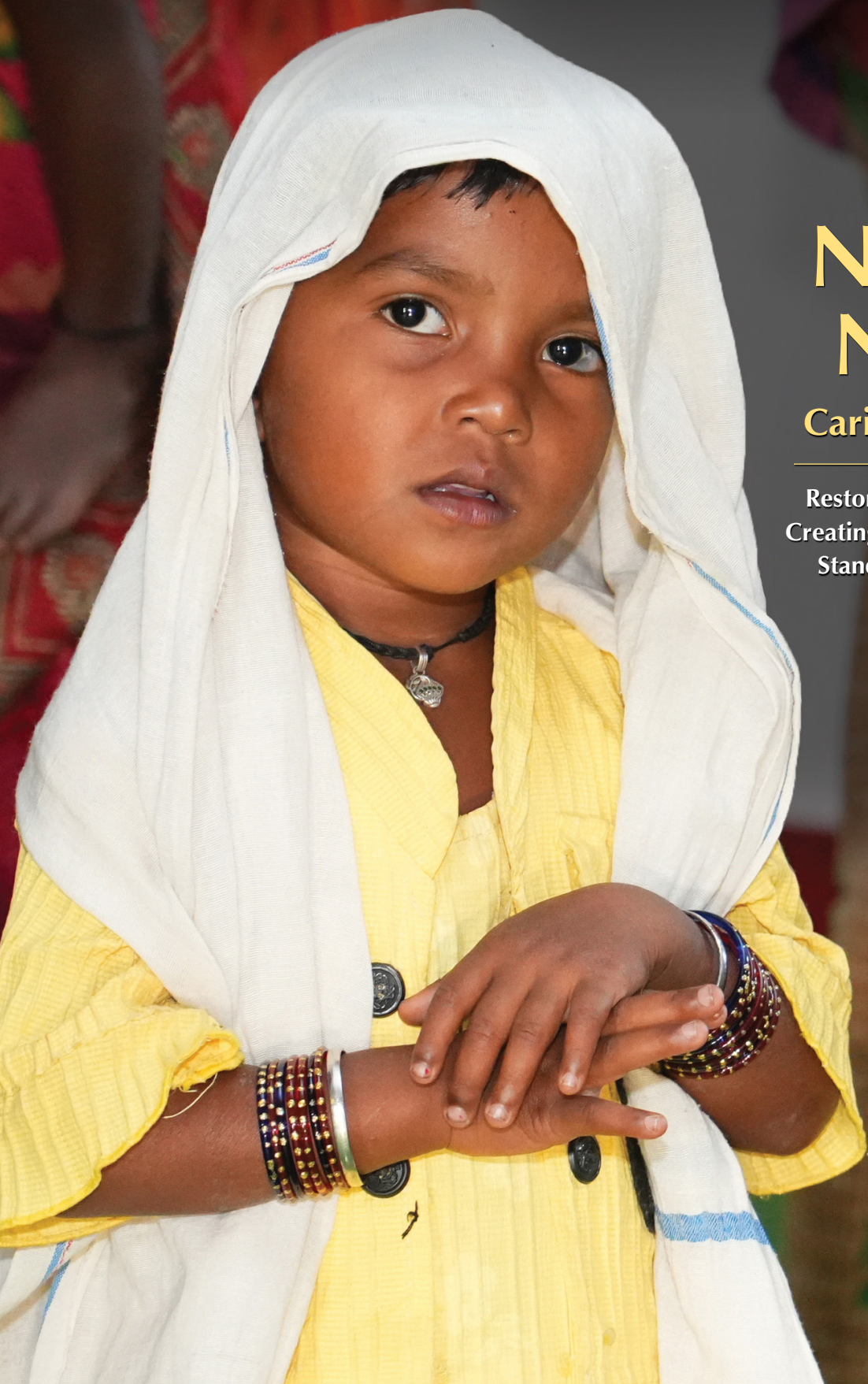
March 2025

God • World • Human Family • Church

## Neglected No More

Caring for India's Tribals

Restoring life amid the ruins in Syria  
Creating family for at-risk Coptic youth  
Standing with a suffering Ukraine





# One

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Advancing tribal communities in India

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*with photographs by Sajeendran V.S.*

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◀ Singing hymns is among the evening activities at the House of St. Marina for girls in Port Fouad, Egypt.



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**Front:** An Adivasi girl attends liturgy at Holy Name of Jesus Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Kurenga, India.

**Back:** Girls play in the courtyard of the House of St. Marina in Port Fouad, Egypt.

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CNEWA connects you to your brothers and sisters in need. Together, we build up the church, affirm human dignity, alleviate poverty, encourage dialogue — and inspire hope.

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On 20 January, a young Palestinian amputee in the Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza, walks past the destruction caused by the Israel-Hamas war. A long-awaited cease-fire went into effect on 19 January.

## Update on Gaza

On 15 January, Israel and Hamas agreed, in principle, to a long-awaited cease-fire. The cease-fire deal, brokered by Egypt and Qatar with support from the United States, called for a 42-day pause in fighting and the return of dozens of Israeli hostages in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

“At long last, a cease-fire has been reached, awaited by 2 million Gazans who have been through unimaginable, horrific conditions and experienced incredible loss,” said Joseph Hazboun, CNEWA’s regional director for Palestine and Israel.

“We pray for the victims on both sides and plan to work diligently to deliver aid to the afflicted and destitute.”

At the time of the cease-fire, the Palestinian Ministry of Health

reported a death toll in Gaza at more than 46,000 people.

## Beginning the Jubilee Year

Launching into the Jubilee of Hope, Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari, CNEWA president, participated in the meeting of the annual steering committee of the aid agencies supporting the Eastern churches (ROACO) sponsored by the Dicastery for Eastern Churches, in Rome, 9-10 January. The gathering of representatives of nearly 30 aid organizations included sessions on the impacts of the Israel-Hezbollah and Russia-Ukraine conflicts, presented by the apostolic nuncios to Lebanon and Ukraine, respectively.

CNEWA kicked off the jubilee year with news of the formal legal recognition of CNEWA Italia, a national office centered in Rome, and the launch of its new website, [cnewa.org/it](https://cnewa.org/it).

In this Jubilee of Hope, the theme of which is “Pilgrims of Hope,” CNEWA is starting a new blog series, “Pilgrims of Healing & Hope,” highlighting significant stewards of its mission. Follow along and read their stories on the CNEWA blog.

## Lebanon Elects a President

The head of Lebanon’s national army, General Joseph Aoun, was sworn in as the 14th president of Lebanon on 9 January, after being elected by the nation’s parliament that same day. A Maronite Catholic, as is the convention for the nation’s head of state, President Aoun’s inauguration ended a two-year vacancy, which coincided with the continued fallout of the August 2020 Beirut port blast, socioeconomic collapse and inflation, a wave of emigration and a devastating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.



Mr. Aoun named Nawaf Salam, head of the International Court of Justice, prime minister on 13 January. Mr. Salam's nomination was endorsed by a parliamentary majority.

"The election of the new president and the nomination of a new prime minister are perceived by all Lebanese as a new era in the political life of Lebanon," said Michel Constantin, CNEWA's regional director for Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, based in Beirut. "It gave a new ray of hope in fighting corruption, building a modern state, and re-establishing the presence of Lebanon on the international map after years of isolation."

### Truce in Syro-Malabar Dispute

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church held its synod of bishops from 6 to 11 January at Mount St. Thomas in Kerala, India, amid the ongoing liturgy disputes in the major archiepiscopal See of Ernakulam-Angamaly. The decades-old conflicts — which stem to the restoration of the Eastern Syriac liturgical traditions of the Eastern Catholic church erased after centuries of imposed Latin rites and practices — have taken an alarming turn with priests staging hunger strikes and burning effigies of church leaders, threatening further schisms among the Christians of St. Thomas. A temporary truce was struck after the synod, on 13 January, to halt the protests, which required police intervention, and to facilitate further dialogue.

### CNEWA's Healing & Hope Gala

CNEWA's third annual Healing & Hope Gala, held in New York on 9 December, concluded events commemorating the 75th anniversary of Pontifical



CNEWA's third annual Healing & Hope Gala, held at a private club in New York City on 9 December, was attended by 300 guests.

Mission, CNEWA's operating agency in the Middle East. The event welcomed some 300 people and raised more than \$300,000 for CNEWA's humanitarian work, especially its program of emergency relief in the Middle East.

"We are all born in Jerusalem, where the cross and the resurrection of the Lord is. But we cannot go there just to see the stones and the places. We have to go there to meet the living stones that are the Christian community," said Archbishop Gabriele G. Caccia, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, who was the guest of honor at the gala.

Amanda Bowman, gala chair, presented CNEWA's Faith & Culture Award to Gayle M. Benson,

philanthropist and owner of the New Orleans Saints and governor of the New Orleans Pelicans, for her outstanding contributions to the promotion of faith in contemporary culture.

### CNEWA Is Moving

After more than 50 years at the Archdiocese of New York's Terence Cardinal Cooke Building on First Avenue in Manhattan, CNEWA moved its headquarters in the middle of February to the historic Daily News Building at 220 East 42nd Street. CNEWA will occupy the 27th floor of the Art Deco structure listed as a U.S. National Historical Landmark, National Register of Historic Places and New York City Landmark. CNEWA's new address is: 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017.

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**M**ongala walks out of his hut of mud and bamboo and greets his visitors with folded hands.

"Namaste," he says.

He smiles and invites them into his home. It's minimalistic, with just enough room for the bare necessities.

"Please have lunch with us. I'll cook," he says.

He leads his guests to a tamarind tree and hands them a leaf with salt and cayenne pepper to eat with the sour but delicious tamarind fruit, picked fresh from the tree.

It's a beautiful winter day in Koleng, a village in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, known as the rice bowl of the country. The sunshine is neither

too harsh nor too dull. The sky is blue.

Meanwhile, Mongala starts preparing the meal. He kills one of the chickens he keeps for food and cooks it on a mud stove. He serves the curried chicken with rice, and later his guests have bananas for dessert, which he picks from his neighbor's yard.





# Last, but not Least

Advancing the lives of India's neglected Indigenous peoples

text by Anubha George with photographs by Sajeendran V.S.



Married with three daughters, ages 3-15, the 30-something Mongala and his family belong to the Adivasi, or tribal, community. His wife forages for food and wood in the forest. His mother, Budari, lives with them. The family numbers among India's minority Catholic community.

"We live a very simple life," says Budari. "The forest gives us

everything we need — food, shelter and wood to keep our home warm.

"Life as an Adivasi is a struggle but being Christian gives me a lot of relief from stress," she says, adding how she loves church hymns.

**A**divasi, a Sanskrit word meaning "original inhabitants," are the

The livelihood of the Adivasi in Chhattisgarh, India, includes raising cattle and growing rice.

Indigenous people of India, also known as tribals. They compose 8.6 percent of the subcontinent's general population — or 104.3 million people, according to the most recent census in 2011 — and are the largest Indigenous group in the world.







There is great diversity among the Adivasi. A government survey conducted 31 years ago identified 635 distinct Adivasi tribes and 447 tribal languages. The largest number lives in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Tribals are numerous in Chhattisgarh as well, representing about a third of its population of just over 25 million. Here, the Adivasi communities speak Gondi, Halbi and Kurukh.

As with other Indigenous groups, Adivasi history is marked by discrimination and marginalization. The Dalits, last in the Indian caste system and known

the spirit of their ancestors. However, a minority embraced Christianity during British rule — a trend that continued post-independence with the arrival of Christian missionaries.

According to the 2011 census, Christians number 27.8 million in India, representing 2.3 percent of the total population. Of these, tribal Christians number 10.03 million, up from 6.3 million 10 years earlier. In 2021, a Pew Research study indicated 74 percent of Christians in India identify with the lower castes, among them 33 percent as scheduled castes and 24 percent as scheduled tribes.

traditional lands by infrastructure and economic development projects, such as dams, mines and highways, leading to increased poverty among these communities. Government statistics show nearly half the Adivasi population currently lives below the poverty line, earning less than \$12 a month.

Magaly, a member of the Catholic Adivasi community in Chhattisgarh, weaves and sells baskets to earn a living. She is in her 50s but is not sure of her age. As with many Adivasi, she does not have a birth certificate or other documentation indicating when she was born. She sells each basket for 12 cents. In a big city, the baskets she weaves would sell for \$3.

“We are very poor,” Magaly says. “Life is a struggle. There’s never enough money for food or clothes or to even get the hut repaired.”

Magaly’s hut has a hole in its roof, which lets in water when it rains and cold in the winter.

“The incentives for adopting Christianity have been many,” says the Reverend Shinod Chacko, a Syro-Malabar Catholic priest from the southern Indian state of Kerala, who has dedicated his ministry to the welfare of the Adivasi.

His primary pastoral responsibility in the Eparchy of Jagdalpur is to accompany people who have recently embraced the faith. Jagdalpur is one of the seven Syro-Malabar Catholic eparchies in Chhattisgarh.

“Christianity has encouraged tribals to send their children to school, especially girls,” he says. “The church has also guided them toward new agricultural techniques, so they earn more money.

“There are fewer alcohol-related problems among those who are Catholic, such as domestic violence and mental health issues,” he adds.

## “Over the decades, the church has been instrumental in the progress made in the tribal communities.”

as “untouchables,” are another traditionally marginalized community in India. The Indian government refers to Dalits as “scheduled castes.” Many of the Adivasi tribes, who were never part of the traditional caste system, are referred to as “scheduled tribes.”

Traditionally, the Adivasi are hunters and gatherers who live in forested areas and practice animism, worshiping nature and

Sister Joel Mathew, C.S.N., accompanies tribal students of St. Michael’s School in Marayoor, in the southern state of Kerala.

The nation’s largest denomination is Catholic, representing 37 percent of the country’s Christians. Adivasi are the majority in some Catholic dioceses and eparchies, and many Adivasi students in church-run schools and colleges are second generation.

However, the development of the forestry sector under British rule caused a shift in the traditional lifestyle of the tribals to horticulture, terrace cultivation and animal husbandry. Since Indian independence in 1947, an estimated 30 million Adivasi have been displaced from their



# The CNEWA Connection



CNEWA works through the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Catholic churches to assist the marginalized Adivasi, or Indigenous, communities in India. Through grants and funding to church-run groups, CNEWA helps provide education, food, lodging, books and medical care for Adivasi children at hostels, boarding schools and other social service programs of these Eastern Catholic communities. Although Christian Adivasi are a minority in Indian society, CNEWA's partners in India make it a priority they are not overlooked or forgotten.

**Help us to ensure the Adivasi communities in India have the resources they need to flourish in faith and daily life. To support this mission, call 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or 1-800-442-6392 (United States) or visit [cnewa.org/donate](https://cnewa.org/donate).**

The Reverend Masu Karma, pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Kurenga, also in Chhattisgarh, cares for the 35 Catholic families in the village and says Christians, nevertheless, face numerous challenges and trials for their faith.

"The tribals here are troubled and abused for being Christian," he says.

The growth of Christianity among tribal and Dalit communities in the past century has sparked waves of violence against Christians by Hindu nationalists. Christians have been beaten, killed, forced to "reconvert" to Hinduism or coerced to leave their villages. Often, police take no action against the perpetrators.

Hindu nationalists equate being Indian with being Hindu, and view Dalits and Adivasi as Hindu, despite the insistence of many Dalits and Adivasi that they are not.

While the Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and affirms India as a secular nation, 12 Indian states had adopted anti-conversion legislation as of December 2024.

National and foreign human rights groups have recorded a growing number of anti-Christian attacks in recent years.

The United Christian Forum, based in New Delhi, recorded 834 instances of anti-Christian violence in the country in 2024, compared with 127 a decade earlier.

In Chhattisgarh — where the state announced its intention in

An Adivasi mother cooks a meal on the mud stove in her hut in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh state. Opposite, Sister Sincy Thomas of the Snehagiri Missionary Sisters husks rice with a tribal woman in Koleng, Chhattisgarh state.

January to make its anti-conversion legislation more stringent — 165 attacks against Christians were documented last year.

In June, for instance, in southern Chhattisgarh, in a village close to Jagdalpur, a mob of vigilantes attacked Christian families. At least two Christian men were knocked unconscious, and three others suffered severe injuries. Christian families were banished from the village and made to sign a statement agreeing they would practice Hinduism within 10 days.

In January 2023, in Narayanpur, about 77 miles northwest of Jagdalpur, a mob of 2,000 people gathered to protest the alleged religious conversion of tribals by Christian missionaries. After the protest, the mob attacked the church with stones and sickles. Two weeks earlier, when at least a thousand Christian tribals went to the local administration in Narayanpur to seek protection from acts of targeted violence, they were jailed.

"We're punished for being Christian," says Father Masu. "But the truth is ever since we came to Jesus, our lives have improved tremendously. We are all united in our religion and we'll fight religious discrimination rather than give up our faith."

"The situation is only going to get worse," says Father Shinod. "The attacks on religious minorities are likely to increase in frequency in the foreseeable future."

"We are called for mission work," he adds. "We have immense faith in Jesus. Despite difficulties and



obstacles, God has his own ways to make things happen.”

The Syro-Malabar Catholic bishop of Jagdalpur, Mar Joseph Kollamparambil, says the “idea that missionary work is all about conversion is false.”

“Over the decades, the church has been instrumental in the progress made in the tribal communities,” says the bishop, originally from Kerala, who came to serve in Chhattisgarh in 1976.

This progress includes road construction, education, skills-training in tailoring, carpentry, masonry and agriculture, and better health facilities for mothers and infants.

“This is a Christian mission. This is our vocation,” says the bishop. “Every day we spend time in prayer and contemplation that God is with us.”

A thick fog hangs over Marayoor, a hill station in the southern Indian state of

Kerala. While most of Kerala is swelteringly humid, with 90-degree temperatures, Marayoor in December is only 10 degrees, not including the wind chill. The weather is unpredictable with dense fog and rain from June until February.

Despite the cold, women of the Muthuvan tribe are busy picking tea leaves in the immaculately maintained gardens. Marayoor is known for its tea — most estates are now owned by big brands

**“The forest gives us everything we need — food, shelter and wood to keep our home warm.”**







Sisters Treasa Paul and Joel Mathew visit the home of their Adivasi students in a tribal colony in Kerala.

— and is famous for a special variety of molasses.

Almost half a million Adivasi in Kerala, representing 1 percent of the state's population, live in the sandalwood forests.

Projects to increase the social empowerment of tribal communities classified as “scheduled tribes” in the Indian constitution, including the Muthuvan, are the responsibility of the government, which imposes restrictions on other individuals and organizations, including the church, regarding the work they can do with tribal communities.

“The tribals here in Marayoor are well looked after by the government,” says Sister Joel Mathew, C.S.N., a member of the Sisters of Nazareth.

“The tribals in Kerala don’t migrate to other places. They stay put,” she says. “They see themselves as protectors of the forest. The government clears the forest for them and gives them land for agriculture.”

The community in Marayoor lives by their own rules. They have their own councils headed by a leader called a “mooppam.” Most disputes are resolved by the mooppam and rules and laws are made by consensus generally.

“One of the things they’ve come up with is to have one child per

family, so a lot of couples have just one child,” says Sister Joel.

The Sisters of Nazareth established their convent, St. Michael Giri, in Marayoor in 1969, and then built two boarding schools for Adivasi children. Fifty boys attend St. Michael’s Boys Home and 29 girls attend St. Michael’s Girls Home. An upper primary school until seventh grade provides education for children in the language of their choice: either Tamil, English or Malayalam.

“Most children come from broken families where either the mother or the father has left the family. Most families also have alcohol-related problems where money is being spent on drinking rather than on the family,” says Sister Joel. “Once they come to us,





we're able to give them a relatively stable life."

The sisters receive a monthly stipend from the government toward the children's food, health care and medicines, as well as assistance from CNEWA.

While the Muthuvans practice animism, the state identifies them officially as Hindu. The local communist government also implements policies to ensure they remain Hindu, forbidding priests from visiting and talking to the tribals about Christianity for fear of religious influence.

"You need permission from the forest officer to go into tribal settlements," says Sister Treasa Paul, C.S.N., convent superior. "They're wary of outsiders, especially foreigners. They feel

threatened if there's the slightest doubt that someone might preach to the Adivasi."

The sisters, however, have a good rapport with the local administration. They educate the children and work with the tribals on women's empowerment, irrespective of their religion.

"Once upon a time, women would work in the fields but were not allowed to take the produce to a market," says Sister Treasa. "In time we've made them understand that it's important for women to be able to earn a living, too."

*Anubha George, a former BBC editor, is a columnist and writer for various publications. She is based in Kerala, India.*



# NEED NOT CREED COMPELS US TO CARE

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# A Letter From Syria

Restoring life amid the ruins

by Dr. Nabil Antaki

Dr. Nabil Antaki stands amid rubble in Aleppo caused by a magnitude 7.8 earthquake that struck the city in 2023.



**Editors' note:** *The fall of the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria on 8 December 2024, after almost 14 years of civil war, began soon after the pro-democracy, anti-Assad protests of the Arab Spring in 2011. The war killed more than 606,000 people, including 159,774 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The war also caused mass migration. At the end of 2024, Syrian refugees numbered about 5.5 million and more than 7.4 million people remained internally displaced. Crippling damage to infrastructure and institutions, compounded by Western sanctions, left the population vulnerable and without basic social services.*

*It is unclear what the future will hold for Syrians, particularly for Syrian Christians, in the changing political landscape. The Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al Sham appointed a new prime minister to head the Syrian Transitional Government without consulting the national council, raising questions about the direction of governance. Additionally, the devaluation of the Syrian pound has exacerbated the challenges facing Syrians in this transitional period.*

*In this Letter From Syria, Dr. Nabil Antaki writes of the poor state of health care in Syria since the start of the civil war and the challenges that persist today. Dr. Antaki is a physician and a member of the Blue Marists, a Catholic lay apostolate providing social assistance to Syrians in need, funded in part by CNEWA-Pontifical Mission.*

When I completed my specialization in Canada after graduating from the medical school at St. Joseph University in Beirut, my wife and I decided to return to Aleppo, my hometown, in Syria. We rightly thought I would be more useful to sick Syrians than in Canada.

For years, I practiced medicine in conditions acceptable to my patients and me. As there was no health insurance, health care was private. Patients paid out of pocket. As for the poor, we treated them free of charge in our Christian institutions or they sought care in public hospitals, which are also free.

In 2011, war broke out in Syria. Bombs and snipers wreaked havoc. Dozens of people died every day, hundreds were injured by bullets or shrapnel and many hospitals were destroyed or damaged. War-wounded civilians died from lack of care because of overcrowded emergency rooms in operable public hospitals. With the Blue Marists, I initiated the "War-Wounded Civilians" project to treat wounded civilians free of charge in the best private hospital in Aleppo, where I worked.

The surgeons there volunteered to treat injured civilians and the hospital agreed to accept reduced fees. My fellow physicians did a heroic job, spending nights in the hospital near patients in critical states or making their way to the hospital under falling bombs and sniper bullets. For years, we treated tens of thousands of injured people free of charge and saved the lives of hundreds more.

When the fighting stopped, we discovered a catastrophic humanitarian, social and health situation: destroyed hospitals, reduced medical staff due to emigration, galloping inflation and extreme poverty. More than 90 percent of the population lived — and still lives — below the poverty line and could not make ends meet. After the military bombs, it was the poverty bomb that exploded — and its effects continue until today.

People could no longer take care of themselves. Their income, if they had any, was insufficient to pay for treatments, medications or surgical procedures.

In response, the Blue Marists, along with other Christian associations, started a project to help people seeking medical care. We made agreements with hospitals, doctors and surgeons to obtain reduced rates and pay them directly for their services. Without this assistance, even someone with an average income could not afford the costs. A small procedure, such as a gallbladder removal, costs around 6 million Syrian pounds (\$475), while the average monthly salary is about 600,000 Syrian pounds (\$46) or less.

I remember Jeannette, a widow with four dependents. She had no income and needed open-heart surgery, which cost 100 million Syrian pounds (about \$8,000). Although our association could not cover such a sum, Providence — which has never failed us — sent us two foreign donors who each covered half the cost.

I think of M.K., a 13-year-old boy born without arms. During the war, in 2015, a mine exploded as he and his family were fleeing ISIS. M.K. was struck and his legs had to be amputated. His medical needs are immense. The Blue Marists took him under our charge and he became my protégé.

To receive treatment, sick people are obliged to make requests from various Christian associations to cover the cost of their care. Each organization — Jesuit Refugee Service, Caritas, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops in Syria and the Blue Marists — contributes to cover the amount. The Blue Marists

**Syrians from the countryside of Aleppo arrive in Tabqa, about 97 miles southeast, on 3 December 2024, having fled the anti-Assad militant groups that took Aleppo a week earlier.**



**“After the military bombs, it was the poverty bomb that exploded — and its effects continue until today.”**







## “It would be a real shame if Syria, the cradle of Christianity, were

The Syrian capital Damascus is pictured hours after the entry of the militant groups and collapse of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024.

receive support from CNEWA, which contributes a good monthly sum toward health care. However, the funds we receive are clearly insufficient given the immense needs of the population.

Furthermore, Syria's medical infrastructure is inadequate, insufficient and obsolete. Our devices are old and cannot be replaced because of a lack of resources, due in part to the sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union.

On 8 December 2024, the regime of Bashar al Assad was overthrown by Hayat Tahrir al Sham, an Islamic jihadist rebel group. If the people are relieved by the fall of a long-running autocratic regime, the Christians in Syria are worried as they do not want to live in an Islamic state under Sharia law.

The Christian population has been especially impacted by the civil war and its consequences, declining from about 2 million in 2011 to about 500,000 currently. The total population in Syria is about 23 million. The Blue Marists want to help Christians, so they remain in the country and do not emigrate. It would be a real shame if Syria, the cradle of Christianity, were to be emptied of its Christians.

We currently face three challenges in health care in the country. First, we must improve the living conditions of families because poverty aggravates illness and prevents people from seeking treatment. Second, we need to ensure employment and a better income for people. This cannot be done without improvements to the economic sector, and the economy can grow only by lifting international sanctions. Third, we must continue to help people receive treatment, which requires greater financial resources and the replacement of our old or unusable medical devices.





## emptied of its Christians.”

The regime change has not affected health care so far. We face the same challenges and difficulties as before. The only good news is that the United States decided on 6 January to lift some of the sanctions regarding health care.

Currently, I am exhausted and pessimistic. The population is exhausted. Fourteen years of conflict, deprivation and shortage, poverty and economic crisis — in addition to a catastrophic earthquake in 2023 and the ongoing threat of Islamist jihadists — have gotten the better of people’s hopes. Some Syrian Christians, too, believe hope in Syria is dead and buried.

As for me, I keep deep within me a flame of hope that is not extinguished definitively — it is rooted in my Christian faith. This little flame of hope gives me strength when everything around me is shaky. It tells me that, at the end of the darkness, there will be light.

Pray for me, pray for us, pray for Syria. ■

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Read more about the shifting situation in Syria and its impact on Christian communities in an exclusive feature report on our website:

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# ‘The War Is Close, We Must Be Closer’

by Archbishop Borys Gudziak

**Editors’ note:** Metropolitan Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia has made more than 10 pastoral trips to Ukraine since Russia’s full-scale invasion began on 24 February 2022, offering pastoral care and solidarity to a suffering people. In January, the United Nations reported the war had killed more than 12,300 civilians and created 4 million internally displaced persons and 6.8 million refugees, making it the biggest war Europe has seen since World War II. As the fourth year of the war begins, the archbishop shares experiences he had last autumn among the communities along the front in eastern and southern Ukraine. Last June, Archbishop Gudziak received CNEWA’s Faith & Culture Award for his outstanding commitment to promoting and preserving the dignity of the human person.

Archbishop Borys Gudziak listens to a parishioner of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Kharkiv, Ukraine, after Divine Liturgy on 8 September 2024.







# RUSHING EMERGENCY RELIEF





**B**oarding a train bound for Odesa, southern Ukraine, I realized I was heading into a war zone. Sometimes the front lines were only 20 miles away — palpably close.

When I arrived, the Odesa port, a key grain hub feeding millions in Africa and the Middle East, was visibly scarred. The great Potemkin Stairs, a renowned Odesan landmark, were deserted. Before the Ukrainian counteroffensive, the front stood on what are now the scored fields of the Mykolaiv region.

The war was painfully raw at the military cemetery on the southern outskirts of Zaporizhzhia. It stared at us vacantly through the windows blown out by daily artillery and rocket fire in the cities, towns and villages stretched along the approximately 600-mile active front, ever present in the missile-ravaged homes from Kryvyi Rih to Kharkiv. It screeched in countless air raid sirens.

On our last night in Kharkiv, a guided bomb landed very close to my team's residence and exploded. I was so consumed and exhausted by all these impressions that, unlike my colleagues, I slept through the air raid alerts four nights in a row.

War helps us focus on what is most important. When confronted with life and death — the fundamental human question — everything frivolous and superficial fades away. When we are forced to look each other in the eyes, we begin to see the other as a person.

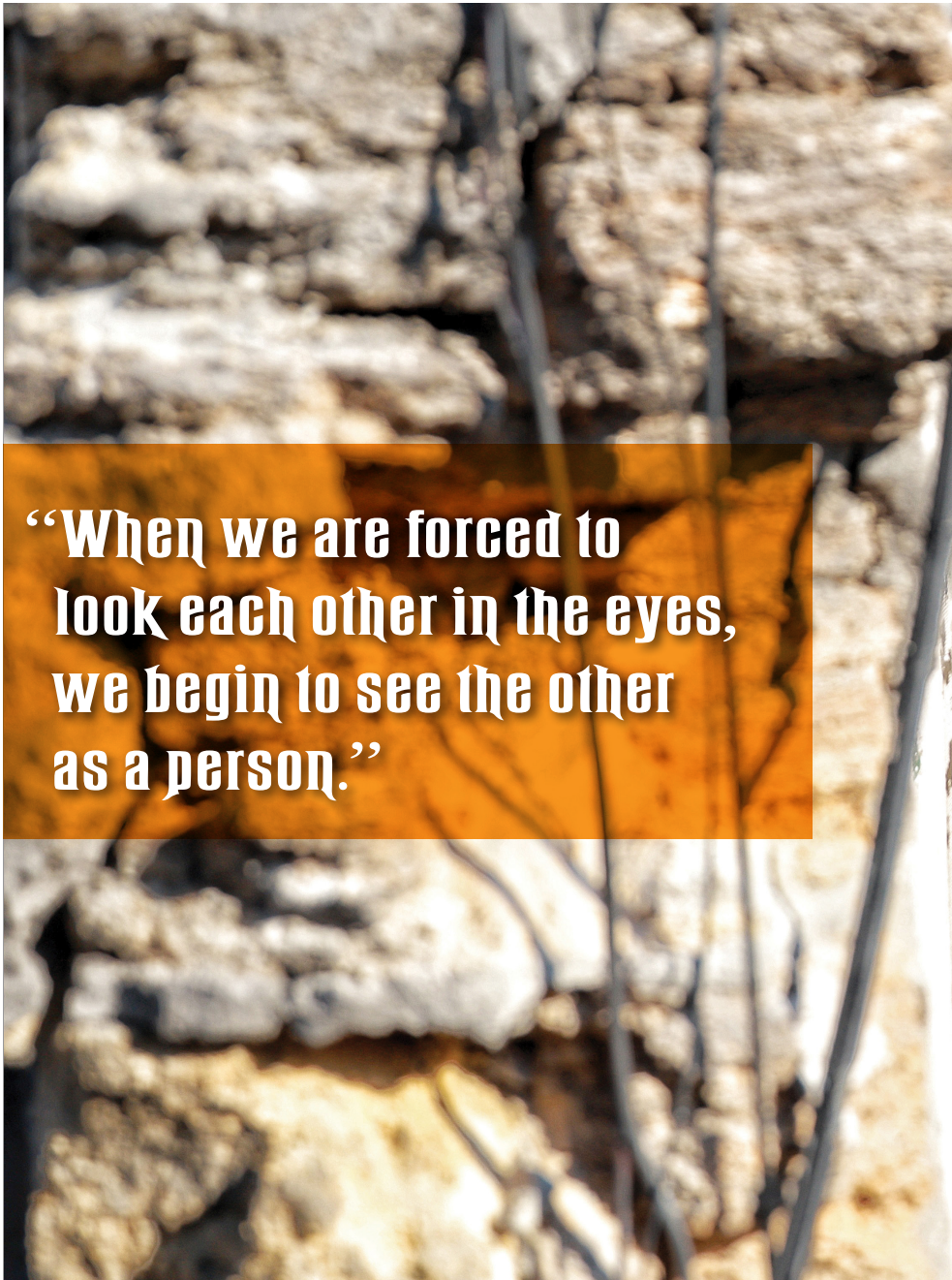
The war is immediate. It is seen in the eyes of Serhiy Gaidarzhy, a young man who lost his wife and 4-month-old son in a direct missile strike last spring. That night, he

and his 3-year-old daughter were sleeping in another room of the apartment they rented in Odesa.

The war is direct. It is experienced in the painful memories of Oleh Pylypenko, a local administration head in the Mykolaiv region, who spent nearly three months in Russian captivity, where he was beaten, tortured and electrocuted. It weighs on the worries of Ludmyla Holub, head of a farming community in Mykolaiv, whose cooperative was nearly destroyed. It is evident in the intense expressions of a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest in

Zaporizhzhia, whose two sons joined the military to protect their land, and in the resolve of the Caritas Zaporizhzhia team, many of whom are internally displaced and have lost their homes — more than once — as Russian troops repeatedly advanced.

The war is a catalyst. It is behind the dedication of the tiny Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Lozova, near Kharkiv, whose members pray in a small one-story house and has dedicated an entire room for volunteers to weave camouflage installations.



**“When we are forced to look each other in the eyes, we begin to see the other as a person.”**

A woman stands outside a house damaged by a large-scale Russian missile strike in Ukraine's Odesa region on 17 November 2024.



The war's devastation is visible in the tears of a young woman we met at the military cemetery near Zaporizhzhia, who had been engaged to a 23-year-old man who fell in battle the previous year. Yet her pain was not self-centered, and she asked us to bless the fresh grave of another soldier, whom she had seen buried without a priest.

The war is close to these people. And my primary mission was to be close to them as well. I wanted to thank them for their resilience, express my respect and assure them of our solidarity. I wanted to tell them we pray every day for the


soldiers and the refugees, the wounded, the deceased and all innocent victims. We pray for the conversion of the genocidal aggressors, the alleviation of pain and healing. I hoped to assure the valiant that there are millions of Americans flying the blue-and-yellow flag outside their homes, making donations, and lifting up prayers and petitions for Ukraine. I wanted to assure them Catholics stand firmly with Ukrainians, they understand where truth and falsehood are found, know the difference between good and evil, and honor the valor of those who

risk their lives to defend this difference.

People were grateful for such help and support, but what they appreciated more was our presence. We heard this from a young Roman Catholic priest in Zaporizhzhia and from the director of a printing house in Kharkiv struck by a rocket on 23 May 2024, killing seven employees and injuring three times as many. We heard this also from the rector of Kharkiv University, which, due first to COVID-19 and then to the invasion, has not functioned normally for almost four years.







All of them told us: "Thank you for being here! We feel we are not abandoned!"

Paradoxical as it sounds, I traveled to eastern and southern Ukraine to learn about faith and joy. What is happening there is sacred, it is sacramental. The defenders of human dignity are helping the world, helping all of us, to understand fully the meaning of life and death, to believe in

eternity, to break free from the worship of comfort, and to open our minds and hearts to profound truths. The tragedy, suffering and evil of war are also an occasion for spiritual awareness and growth.

This war has also given me a better understanding of my parents. My mother's older sister died in 1945 in the anti-Soviet resistance of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. My father, as a teenager, fled the country, leaving behind his parents, who had

**"Faith and community provided fortitude. Commonality of purpose served as a foundation for resilience."**





buried eight children and later saw their ninth deported to Siberia. As refugees, my mother and father witnessed atrocities, witnessed the Holocaust. My aunt, who later lived in Queens, New York, helped to carry water so families could wash and identify the bodies of those tortured in a Soviet prison in Zolochiv. Growing up, my parents told me all these stories, but I had not fully grasped them. Raised in the comfort of suburban America in the '60s and '70s, my imagination

could not register such barbarity. But now, having seen war so closely, having looked into the eyes of those who lost their homes and their loved ones, I feel I understand better.

And I know there is hope.

My parents' generation survived. They studied, started families, raised children and nurtured community life. Yes, they were marked by trauma, which was at times evident in addiction, conflict or aggression. But, with the grace of God and the community of the church, their lives bore much fruit. Faith and community provided fortitude. Commonality of purpose served as a foundation for resilience.

Those same virtues are what I saw in Ukraine, close to the war. I saw a great love for life. The people near the front want to live and want to prevail. They cannot afford to lose, to live under occupation or to have their hope taken away. I saw the authenticity of human experience and the power of community. And I hope to share something of this power here in the United States, where we can sometimes lose hope as we see our communities decline in the face of many challenges.

Arriving in Odesa on 4 September, I realized the proximity of war is not merely geographical. While the train was taking me closer to the war zone, a Russian hypersonic missile hit an apartment building in Lviv, a city thought to be safe. The attack affected several families I know. A second-year student at Ukrainian Catholic University, Daryna Bazylevych, 18, along with her sisters, Yaryna, 21, and Emilia, 7, and their mother, Yevhenia, 43, were killed while sheltering in the staircase of the building. Their father, Yaroslav, alone survived. For him, in Lviv, the war is as immediate as it is for Serhiy in Odesa.

The war is close. And this means we must be closer. ■

Archbishop Borys Gudziak prays at the grave of a fallen Ukrainian soldier at a military cemetery near Zaporizhzhia on 6 September 2024.

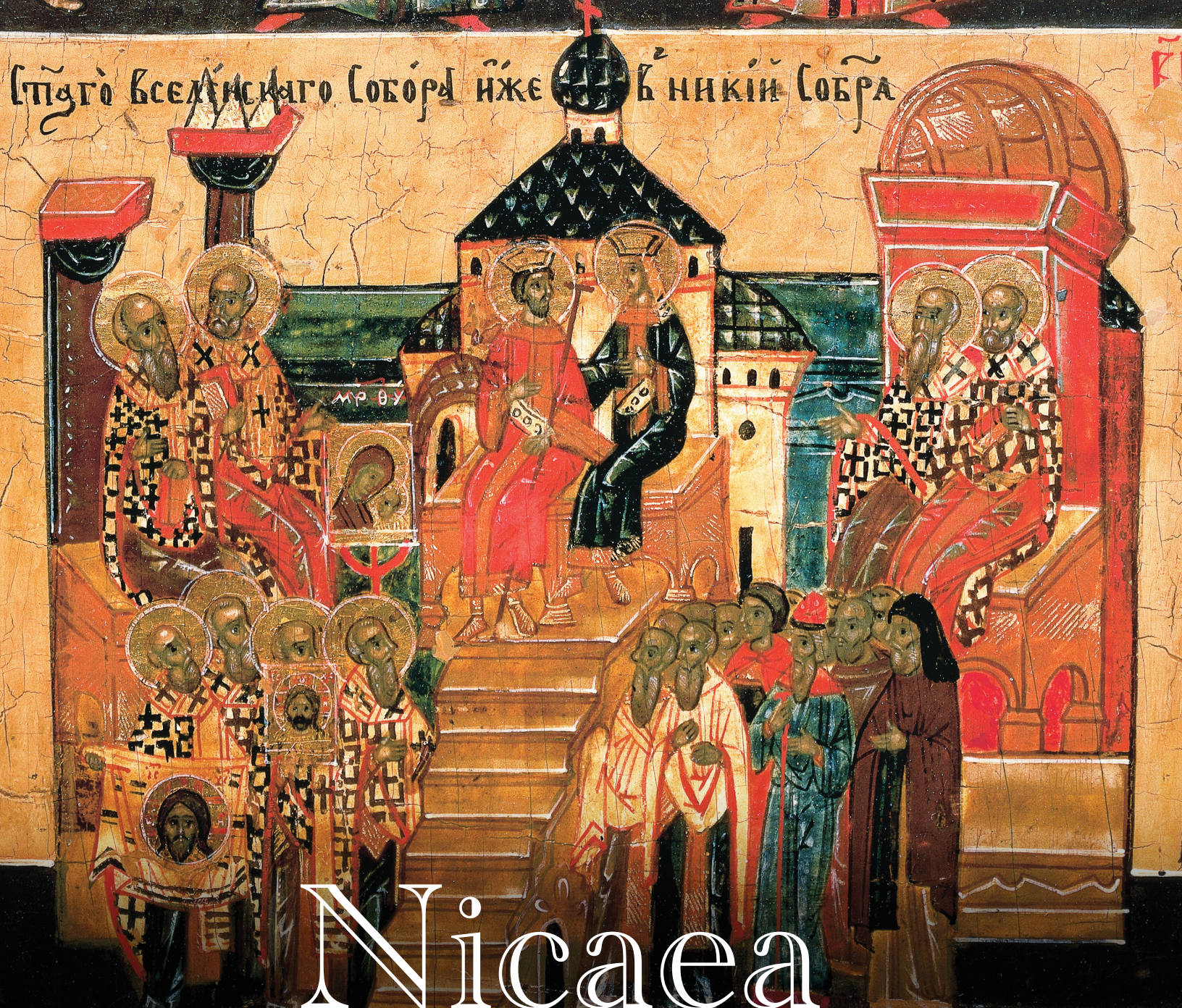


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# Nicaea

## and the Evolution of Ecumenism

Setting the next stage on the path to Christian unity

by Elias Mallon, S.A.





This year the church worldwide observes the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Held in the Roman city of Nicaea in present-day northwestern Turkey, between May and July 325, this gathering of bishops and leaders of the church was the first to be identified as “ecumenical,” the definition of which has evolved in the last 1,700 years. A great deal, good and regrettable, has occurred in the life of the church in those 17 centuries.

The council coincided with profound changes in the Greco-Roman world in general and in the Christian world in particular. At the end of the third century and beginning of the fourth, the Roman emperor Diocletian unleashed one of the most brutal persecutions of Christians in the history of the empire — although the thoroughness of the brutality varied from place to place. In addition to wiping out any challenge to his authority, and to further consolidate his power and secure the borders of his sprawling empire, which extended from Persia to Britain, he restructured the empire into four self-governing units led by two senior emperors, known as “augusti,” and two junior colleagues understood to be their designated successors, called “caesares.”

In 306, a year after Diocletian’s abdication, Constantine was proclaimed emperor by his army at Eboracum, present-day York, England. He eventually emerged victorious in the civil wars against his peers, Maxentius and Licinius,

This 18th-century icon shows the emperor Constantine presiding over the First Council of Nicaea, with his mother, Helen, and the council fathers at either side. The Eastern Christian representation of the council emphasizes Constantine’s role and the spirit of synodality.

to become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire by 324.

During this period, Constantine attributed his victories to a special relationship he felt with the God of the Christians, “in whose sign he conquered,” including his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312.

Thus, in a period of roughly 20 years, Christianity emerged as the favored religion of the emperor and, hence, the empire. As with Diocletian, consolidating power and securing the borders ranked high among Constantine’s priorities. The political and the religious spheres were not separate then, and division and chaos, whether political or religious, were to be avoided and overcome at all costs.

There were several challenges disrupting the unity of Christians in his realm, however. The most significant involved the priest Arius, whose teachings denied the full divinity of Christ. This was not the first time Constantine had to deal with inner-Christian issues. In 314, he had convoked the Synod of Arles to address the controversy of the Donatists, a heretical sect in North Africa. Ultimately, it was Constantine who, without consulting the bishop of Rome, decided on and convoked the first council to be held in Nicaea.

The fact of the not-yet-baptized Constantine convoking and presiding over the first ecumenical council has been a source of some cognitive dissonance philosophically and theologically between the Christian East and the Christian West. This dissonance is perhaps most evident in the iconography of the council. In the Christian East, where Constantine is revered as a saint along with his mother, Helen, the emperor is depicted in the center of the icon as presiding over the council. Seated on either side of him

without precedence in synodal fashion are the bishops, depicted in Byzantine vestments, each holding the Gospel. A vanquished Arius lies at the feet of the council fathers.

In the art of the Christian West, the delegate of the pope is flanked by two cardinals and presides over the council. Bishops in Latin-rite vestments listen and confer with each other as the heresies of Arius, who stands as if on trial, are read aloud. Constantine usually is depicted at the periphery of the image, being informed of the proceedings rather than guiding them.

The Western portrayal is clearly anachronistic, applying a much later Western understanding of ecumenical councils.

It is important to understand the development of the ecumenical councils in a constantly dividing Christian world. Almost every council, including Vatican II (1962-1965), has produced dissidents, some of whom became schismatic and excluded — oftentimes by self-exclusion — from communion with the Church of Rome.

While not directly connected with an ecumenical council, the mutual excommunication of the pope and the ecumenical patriarch in 1054, known as the Great Schism, which began the formal drifting apart of the Catholic West and the Orthodox East, has led the Orthodox to reject all Catholic general councils after 1054 as non-ecumenical because of the non-participation of the Orthodox. Both technically and theologically, this is a crucial point.

The word “ecumenical” originally referred to that which involved all Christians from the “inhabited world” (“oikumene” in Greek), which were in communion or agreement in the faith. Tragically,





## The Primary Dispute at the First Council of Nicaea

Jesus asks his disciples a question of paramount importance: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15). Peter replies: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16).

The question of who Jesus is, however, continued to confound early Christians, who offered different understandings of Jesus, especially the teachings of the priest Arius in the Egyptian city of Alexandria.

Arius believed the Father created Jesus out of nothing at a separate moment, subordinate, therefore, to the Father. Jesus, Arius believed, was not truly God, eternal being, of the same substance as God the Father existing before all creation.

To resolve this dispute, which caused great division among the growing Christian communities in the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine called a council of hierarchs in Nicaea, present-day Iztok, Turkey, in 325.

Tradition holds that 318 bishops from throughout the world gathered in Nicaea, the same number as trained men in Abraham’s household recounted in Genesis.

The council condemned Arianism and affirmed the divinity of Jesus, proclaiming Jesus is the same as the Father in being, essence and substance. The council articulated this truth of the Christian faith by composing the Nicene Creed, which Christians profess to this day.

In answering this fundamental question of faith, the First Council of Nicaea is not an abstract, philosophical argument from the past, but provides the answer that remains essential to all Christians today.

The fathers of the council — the first of the seven “ecumenical” councils, ecumenical meaning universal — also established a common observance for the date of Easter, after the spring equinox according to the lunar months; added canons to church law; and was the only ecumenical council to include representation from all the churches.

In the art of the Christian West, the delegate of the pope is flanked by two cardinals and presides over the council, while Constantine, in the foreground, is informed of the proceedings rather than guiding them. At left, the portion of an icon modeled on Rublev’s Old Testament Trinity depicts the Father gazing at the Son.

each “ecumenical” council made the meaning of the word “ecumenical” more restrictive and less inclusive.

In the 19th century, Protestant missionary groups began to realize that the almost endemic divisions of Christianity made the message of the Gospel less credible. The division among Christians was not a situation to be endured, but a sin to be overcome. Slowly, a movement to restore unity among Christians began.

The two great and horrible wars of the 20th century, waged primarily, although not exclusively, by Christians, gave a terrifying impetus to the emerging movement. Among other initiatives, the World Council of Churches was founded in 1948. With the 1964 publication of Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, “Unitatis redintegratio,” the Catholic Church committed to the ecumenical search for Christian unity. But an interesting phenomenon occurred.

With Christians committing to search for unity, the meaning of the word “ecumenical” took on a new meaning, opposite to its original use. If for centuries an ecumenical meeting was among believers in communion with each other, now it came to mean a meeting among believers who do not share communion yet hope to restore it. The “ecumenical” Council of Nicaea was not “ecumenical” in the same way as ecumenical would be understood today for 21st-century Christians.





The goal of Nicaea — unity in faith among Christians — remains, but the methodology has changed almost 180 degrees and, if we are honest, continues to evolve. Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople have contributed greatly to that evolution.

One hears of an ecumenism of friendship. It is obvious the two hold each other in esteem. Neither one minimizes the theological differences that divide them. Neither one denies the importance of ongoing theological dialogue. However, both men realize people can differ, even significantly, and still have a profound friendship and affection for each other. Francis and Bartholomew show us we do not have to achieve “perfect unity” — perhaps an eschatological goal anyway — before we can love each other and work together to achieve the many things we hold dear and in common.

An example of this newer form of ecumenical encounter is the annual visits of the two church leaders. On 29 June, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, patrons of Rome, the ecumenical patriarch sends a delegation to attend the celebrations presided over by the bishop of Rome. On 30 November, the feast of St. Andrew, patron of Byzantium (re-founded by Constantine as New Rome, but commonly called Constantinople until the adoption of its Turkish name, Istanbul, in 1930), the bishop of Rome sends a special envoy to celebrate the patronal feast of the ecumenical patriarchate, now located in an unassuming complex in Turkey’s bustling cultural, economic and historic capital.

By any measure, 1,700 years is a long time. The weight of history is heavy and there is a temptation to let it dominate the observance. Nicaea is a historical event to be sure. However, as with many religious observances, it is an event that is not merely archival. Nicaea

is about the past, but not just the past, as the shift in the Christian understanding of the meaning of “ecumenical” demonstrates. It might point to a new way and provide Christians today with a new impulse and tools for the next stage in the road to Christian unity.

The pope’s message for the visit to Constantinople in 2024 was special in that he suggested the two churches observe and celebrate the anniversary. He wrote: “The now imminent 1,700th anniversary of the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea will be another opportunity to bear witness to the growing communion that already exists among all who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

This is not merely a symbolic gesture, although it is a powerful symbol. It is a practical action showing not only a true bond of affection, but a concretization of the unity that already exists between the two churches — something to celebrate indeed. ■









# A Place They Call 'Home'

EQUIPPING EGYPT'S VULNERABLE  
YOUTH TO EMBARK ON LIFE'S JOURNEY

TEXT BY MAGDY SAMAAH WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER ANIS





Nestled in the city of Port Fouad, Egypt, located at the mouth of the Suez Canal, is a sanctuary for young women facing adversity.

St. Marina Orphanage is situated within a church complex that includes four buildings facing a common courtyard. The enclosed grounds offer residents a sense of safety and community.

Visitors to the orphanage are welcomed into a spacious reception hall. Comfortable armchairs line three walls. The fourth wall features a large image of the Virgin Mary, complemented by a smaller image of St. Marina and a plaque, inscribed with a hymn about the saint's unwavering faith and devotion.

About 45 Christian girls and young women from across the country, ages 15 to 25, sit quietly on the carpet, listening to the staff carry on a conversation. The atmosphere of calm and tranquility stands in stark contrast to the struggles many of these girls endured before arriving at St. Marina's.

The three-story facility welcomes orphans, but also girls and young women from abusive situations or those whose parents believe their futures are at risk. As a result, the staff prefers to call it the "House of St. Marina" and strives to create a family environment and sense of belonging. The house provides holistic care — physical, spiritual, psychological and educational — to equip the girls as they prepare to embark on new life journeys.

"This is home for every girl in need," says Isis Rateb, the house supervisor. "I often wonder: If Bishop Tadros had not established this place, what would have happened to these girls? Where would they have gone?"

The house began 39 years ago as a shelter for a few girls from families in difficult circumstances. However, as this need grew through the 1980s, Metropolitan

Tadros of the Coptic Orthodox Eparchy of Port Said, officially established the home.

The church's response to other social needs resulted in the expansion of services and the construction of the church complex, which also includes a home for the elderly and people with disabilities, a residence for consecrated women, a public hospital and a chapel.

The Reverend Yaqob Rashed oversees the complex, as well as St. Abanoub Orphanage for boys at St. Mar Girgis Coptic Orthodox Church nearby.

Egypt has a considerable number of orphaned children, estimated at around 1.5 million, and is home to numerous orphanages, primarily run by nongovernmental organizations, churches and religious groups. Aside from parental death, reasons for orphanhood include parental illness, abandonment, poverty, domestic violence and family disintegration.

Father Yaqob says marital problems are widespread in the Christian community and couples often turn to the church for resolution. However, since resolution is not always possible and divorce for Coptic Christians in Egypt is difficult to obtain, some spouses convert to Islam, which nullifies the Christian marriage under Egyptian law. Many of the spouses left behind in this scenario are unable to manage raising the children on their own and fall into destitution. In response, the church in Egypt runs various outreach programs for children, as well as

orphanages and homes, which provide for the children's basic needs within a warm and stable environment.

Of the 45 girls and young women at the House of St. Marina last autumn, more than two-thirds were minors. Their reasons for being there are as varied as their backgrounds, says Father Yaqob. At any given time, he estimates about half of the girls are at the home due to family disintegration — including physical and sexual abuse in their families — and a



Previous page, teenage girls play in the courtyard of the House of St. Marina in Port Fouad, Egypt. At right, Isis Rateb, house supervisor, leads a Bible study in the home's reception hall.



tenth are there because of parental death or a parent's conversion to Islam.

The balance of the residents of the home are minors whose parents are concerned about their daughters' behavior, which in traditional Coptic and Egyptian society is considered at-risk, such as developing a romantic relationship with a Muslim boy or man. Often these begin on social media, which erases distinctions of class and creed. They fear for their daughter's

**"It is a ministry emphasizing spiritual, educational and social development, creating an environment where children can thrive with dignity."**





future, concerned she will run away, convert to Islam and cut off her family — increasing her marginalization and vulnerability. In some cases, girls have already run away and were brought to the home after their parents found them. At a loss with how to handle the situation, these parents hope the staff at the home will help their daughters reach maturity and make appropriate choices for their future.

“Adolescence is a time of love and infatuation,” says Father

Yaqob. “When a girl receives affection from a Muslim or a Christian boy while feeling rejected by her family, she may become attached. At this age, marriage is not an option.”

The house serves “to remove her temporarily from that environment so she can regain focus and start anew,” he explains.

Sometimes, these girls come to the house against their will and will even try to run away. Despite the initial struggles, the girls typically regain a sense of stability

over time through the daily rhythm at the house, says co-supervisor Karima Aziz.

“Eventually, they reflect on their situation and say, ‘I was naïve,’ ” she says.

The home’s caregivers ensure the girls are occupied from dawn until dusk with structured activities designed to emphasize well-being and skill development.

Smartphones are not allowed in the house, although girls are permitted to call their family if the family situation allows.

**“We have formed a wonderful bond;  
they have become everything in our lives.”**





# The CNEWA Connection

“The girls arrive from an environment without structure. Here, everything is organized — from waking up to prayer, meals and activities,” says Father Yaqob.

The structure at St. Marina’s can shock the newcomer. Each day begins at 6 a.m. with morning prayer and educational activities. The girls who are at risk of running away study at the house in a home-school environment, while others attend local schools.

After school, the girls engage in various activities, such as cooking, sports and spiritual studies. They take turns managing household responsibilities and fostering teamwork.

In the evening, the dining hall transforms into a vibrant handicrafts workshop where the girls practice needlework, lacemaking, knitting and crochet. Karima patiently guides them from the basic skill of threading a needle to producing altar covers and decorative items. Each day includes spiritual activities as well, such as copying Bible passages, studying Scripture, prayer and memorizing hymns. It’s lights out at 10 p.m.

“In this home, spiritual nourishment outweighs practical skills,” says Father Yaqob. “The activities are designed to fill their time with hymns, Bible lessons and arts, keeping their minds occupied while addressing their spiritual needs.”

These girls come from impoverished backgrounds, and their parents are not equipped to manage the complexities of adolescence today.

Coptic Christians represent only a tenth of the country’s population.

Top right, the dining hall at St. Marina’s, where the girls have their meals, transforms into a handicrafts workshop, at left, in the evening.



In line with CNEWA’s commitment to care for the most vulnerable — particularly children — it supports St. Marina and St. Abanoub orphanages through the Development and Social Services Authority of the Coptic Orthodox Eparchy of Port Said. These homes encourage young people to overcome challenges, whether it is orphanhood or familial troubles, to pursue a better path forward. In addition to providing shelter and nourishing meals, the homes offer spiritual and social nourishment through prayer, classes and activities.

**CNEWA’s funding helps these young people heal and find hope. To support this mission, call 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or 1-800-442-6392 (United States) or visit [cnewa.org/donate](http://cnewa.org/donate).**

Most live in Upper Egypt, where 80 percent of people live in extreme poverty, according to the World Bank. Due to legal restrictions, discriminatory practices against Christians and other forms of social exclusion, Christians in Egypt face disproportionate levels of illiteracy, unemployment and violence, exacerbating the fragmentation of vulnerable families.

As a result, the girls at St. Marina’s do not come from “a healthy environment that teaches and nurtures them,” says Ms. Rateb, who oversees the house with a blend of firmness and compassion. “But when they encounter a positive atmosphere, they truly thrive.”

Martina Wadie, 16, has lived at the house for several months.

“Outside, we were preoccupied with worldly matters, but here we cultivate our talents, pray and read the Bible,” she says. “This seclusion allows us to find our own voice.”

Kristin Makram, 20, a second-year university student, says she has learned to “become more patient and responsible” since moving to St. Marina’s.

Stays can range from one month to two years or more, depending on each girl’s individual circumstance. If the home situation improves, girls return to their families. However, if her situation does not allow her to return, she can stay at the home until she marries or, once she reaches the





## **“We refuse to call this place an orphanage; we call it a home.”**

age of maturity, finds a job and sets out on her own.

Those who choose to marry will often do so on the recommendation of the house staff, Father Yaqob explains. Following what is customary in traditional Coptic society, the house adheres to the practice of arranging marriages. When a young man expresses interest in marrying one of the girls, the house staff steps in to do what a parent otherwise would. Ms. Rateb and Father Yaqob interview the young man, assess his financial situation and job stability. If they are satisfied with his responses, they will speak with a young woman at

the house who is willing and prepared to embrace marriage and family life.

Yuliana Medhat, 24, is preparing for her engagement after two transformative years. She earned a bachelor's in commerce and plans to launch her own business.

“Through my academic education and learning handicrafts at the workshop, I am capable of opening a workshop and establishing a company, in addition to getting married,” she says.

**E**very morning at 5 a.m., Amal Nashed begins her day by preparing sandwiches for the 13 boys at St. Abanoub Orphanage.

The boys call her “Mama” and her husband, Geroges Lotfy, “Papa.” As the sun rises, the boys depart for school.

The couple, now in their early 60s, embraced their work at the orphanage, nurturing the boys from toddlers to teens, since the mid-1990s, after losing their only two sons as toddlers. They have cultivated an environment at the orphanage where each child feels important and cherished, imparting essential skills and values that foster personal development and mirroring the love and connection found in traditional families.

“We have formed a wonderful bond; they have become



Father Yohanna Adib sits among the boys and their caregivers at St. Abanoub Orphanage in Port Fouad, Egypt.

everything in our lives. I've witnessed them grow, marry and celebrate the births of their own children," says Ms. Nashed.

This familial atmosphere is further highlighted when Ms. Nashed takes the children shopping during the holidays. The boys, calling out for her in the shop, often leave shop owners astonished at the sight of such a large family.

The orphanage began in a small apartment in the early 1980s, caring for only one boy. As the number of children increased, the orphanage relocated to a new building within the St. Mar Girgis parish complex in Port Fouad.

It is located on the fourth floor. It consists of two interconnected apartments with seven rooms. Each bedroom has three beds. There are two common rooms and a dining area.

Two teams of caregivers take turns living with the boys full time throughout the week, preparing meals, assisting the boys with their studies, and guiding them in their development with a disciplined and loving approach.

The rotation for Ms. Nashed, Mr. Lotfy and another caregiver, Marcelle Aziz, falls from Thursday to Monday. Marcelle is equally committed to the boys after retiring from a banking career.

"Raising these children is significantly more challenging than nurturing my own son," says Marcelle. "We worry about them even more."

After graduation, the young men set out on their own, but the bonds formed at the home tend to last and some return to visit from time to time. Mina Nasser, 32, is among them. He moved to

St. Abanoub as a young boy, while his two sisters moved to St. Marina. He now works with a company affiliated with the Suez Canal Authority. One of his sisters married and started a family.

"What I learned here is hard to find outside," he says. "The most valuable lesson was discipline. It was challenging as kids, but I later realized its importance."

The Reverend Yohanna Adib, pastor at St. Mar Girgis Church and supervisor of St. Abanoub's, cites marital breakdown, family disintegration, parental death and a parent's conversion to Islam among the reasons the boys arrive at the house.

He says these boys face the general challenges of young people posed by smartphones and social media in addition to the challenges that come with being from a broken family.

"Caring for younger children is generally easier than older ones, who often come with established behaviors that require more effort," he adds.

In cases where a child has at least one parent, the church first explores ways to keep that child with the remaining parent, especially when they are prepared to assume responsibility — even if that means providing the parent with some financial aid, he explains.

Similar in spirit and mission to St. Marina's, Father Yohanna says the staff and children "refuse to call this place an orphanage; we call it a home."

"It is a ministry emphasizing spiritual, educational and social development, creating an environment where children can thrive with dignity."

*Based in Cairo, Magdy Samaan is the Egypt correspondent for The Times of London. His work also has been published by CNN.*



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***“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.”  
(Mt 6:9-10)***

With each March edition, we mark the anniversary of the founding of CNEWA by Pope Pius XI on 11 March 1926.

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica and inaugurated the jubilee year 2025, which focuses on the virtue of hope. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. Permit me to suggest we reflect, pray and consider the intimate and organic link between the virtue of hope and the mission of CNEWA and Pontifical Mission.

The opening lines of the Lord’s Prayer — in fact, the entire prayer — are an expression of the virtue of hope. From the opening lines, we recognize ourselves as creatures before the Creator, entrusted with a specific mission. We are to be agents of God’s holiness, bringing his kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. We are to be agents of God’s holiness, who seek to carry out his will.

The church, through doctrine and pastoral leadership, teaches us that hope gives us purpose on our pilgrim journey through life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength” (1817).

Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 encyclical dedicated to Christian hope, “Spe salvi,” writes: “Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well” (2).

Pope Francis continues to encourage us regularly to nurture hope on our Christian journey, saying at a General Audience on 8 May last year, “Hope is the answer offered to our heart, when the absolute question arises

in us: ‘What will become of me? What is the purpose of the journey? What is the destiny of the world?’ ”

Very often, Pope Francis links the virtue of hope with the ability of people to smile. When we find ourselves in darkness, with a loss of direction, overwhelmed by our difficulties and challenges, it is oftentimes the virtue of hope, Pope Francis says, “which teaches us to smile.” In dramatic language, he uses an image I have often contemplated and used when he writes, “When we are before a child, although we have many problems and many difficulties, a smile comes to us from within, because we see hope in front of us: A child is hope!” (General Audience, 7 December 2016).



During this jubilee year, let us pray for a deepening of the virtue of hope within ourselves. Let us journey as pilgrims of hope in our families, among friends, in our places of work, in the public square of our republic, and by our desire to be agents of healing and hope throughout CNEWA’s world!

The articles contained in this edition challenge us to re-commit our lives to the virtue of hope.

- This year, as the church marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first great ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, Father Elias Mallon, S.A., special assistant to the president, offers insightful and important reflections. In addition to its contribution to the development of dogma in our profession of faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is “consubstantial with the Father,” the council also offered us an early view of the meaning of ecclesial synodality — that all baptized, according to their particular gifts, build the body of Christ, the church.



Mina Nasser hugs an orphan boy on a return visit to St. Abanoub Orphanage, a CNEWA-funded project in Port Fouad, Egypt, where he was raised in a family atmosphere.

- The state of Syrian society in the wake of the recent political upheaval in the country is reported in an exclusive article on CNEWA's website. However, our first-person testimony in this print edition by Dr. Nabil Antaki on health care in Syria, which CNEWA has been funding for more than a decade, calls for your prayers, your awareness, your donations.
- CNEWA has been caring for needy and vulnerable children through the support of homes for orphaned and at-risk youth, as reported in this edition of the magazine, and the improvement of church-run schools in Minya, Luxor and Cairo. Please pray with us and for us and become a partner through your generous support.
- Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and chair of CNEWA's board, has made clear his support for those suffering, dying and displaced. In this issue, Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia shares his experience from a recent trip to Ukraine, where CNEWA has partnered with Caritas Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and other church-run groups, as we make every effort, as Pope Francis calls us, to be instruments of hope in "martyred Ukraine."
- In November, I visited CNEWA's staff in Kerala, southern India, where the church, while facing many challenges, continues to respond to the needs of people in the periphery of Indian society, as the article in this issue highlights.

As we journey through the holy season of Lent, from 5 March to 17 April, let us examine the ways in which we see in the Lord's Prayer a challenge to live the virtue of hope. Let us try to avoid the two sins against the virtue of hope: despair and presumption.

With my gratitude and prayers,

*Peter I. Vaccari*

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President





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