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March 2024

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*Decades of
Healing and Hope*



One

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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
CATHOLIC NEAR EAST
WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Volume 50 NUMBER 1



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Front: Ali Ezedin hugs his sister, Mai, in the playground of Jesuit Refugee Service in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Back: Students at Debre Selam Mariam Catholic School in Gondar, Ethiopia, dress up for their school's Christmas celebration.

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Front cover, Abenezer Israel; pages 2, 16-19, back cover, Petterik Wiggers; page 3 (top), CNS photo/Paul Haring; pages 3 (upper left), 8-13, Yad Abdulqader; page 3 (upper right), OSV News photo/Shir Torem, Reuters; pages 3 (lower left), 26-29, Sajeendran V.S.; pages 3 (lower right and far right), 30-37, Konstantin Chernichkin; page 5, Christian Molitor, R.S.M.; page 6, CNEWA Jerusalem; page 7, Svitlana Dukhovych; pages 14-15, Michele Spataro/AFP via Getty Images; page 21 (top), OSV News photo/Itai Ron, Reuters; page 21 (bottom), OSV News photo/ Leah Millis, Reuters; pages 24-25, Madeleine Jettre/Alamy Stock Photo; page 38, Ilene Perlman; page 39, CNEWA.

ONE is published quarterly. ISSN: 1552-2016

CNEWA

Founded by the Holy Father, CNEWA shares the love of Christ with the churches and peoples of the East, working for, through and with the Eastern Catholic churches.

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Happy birthday, One

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CNEWA WORLD

“Quietly and without fanfare the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) marked its golden jubilee at the end of 1974,” noted the editors in the second edition of this magazine in the spring of 1975.

“Its dynamic national secretary, Monsignor John G. Nolan, observed the occasion in a characteristic way. He and his associates launched this new publication, *Catholic Near East Magazine*. It aims, as you know, to cultivate among our readers a deeper understanding of the progress of the church and its people in the lands of the Middle East.”

Much has happened in our world, our church, our communities and in the life of this special initiative of the Holy See since those words were published five decades ago. For starters, *Catholic Near East Magazine* — after a temporary rebranding as *CNEWA World*

prompted by CNEWA’s 75th anniversary in 2001 — is now known as *ONE*. This reflects, as I wrote in the May-June 2004 edition, “the agency’s charism — always act as if we are all one, unless we are forced to encounter a difference.”

“Without doubt, *ONE* is a Catholic publication,” I continued. “But *ONE* decidedly bucks the trend of modern society, which seeks to emphasize what divides us, either by nationality, ethnicity, religion, politics or values.

“As CNEWA’s official publication, *ONE* recognizes both what makes all peoples and faiths unique and what all people of good will have in common: the God-given gift of love.”

Love. What a simple word. Yet, much like the word “peace,” how complex, how elusive a concept in a world ripped apart by the utter lack of both. This year not only marks the occasion of the golden jubilee of *ONE* magazine — truly a

cause for celebration in an age of instability — but the birthdays of two special instruments of the universal church’s love for a broken world: the centenary of the original U.S.-based Catholic Near East Welfare Association and the diamond jubilee of Pontifical Mission for Palestine.

Let me explain. The suffering of humanity caught up in the violent dissolution of the Russian and Ottoman empires after World War I profoundly moved the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV. He initiated humanitarian relief efforts throughout Asia Minor and Europe, which his successor, Pius XI, continued upon his election after Benedict’s premature death in January 1922. These aid efforts included contacts with Catholic leaders in the United States, including the Jesuit priest, Edmund A. Walsh, and the founder of the Friars of the Atonement, the Rev. Paul Wattson.

Troubled by the news of displaced Armenians, Assyrians and Chaldeans, Greeks and anti-Bolshevik Russians seeking refuge in Constantinople — the capital of the evaporating Ottoman world — and moved by the pope's appeals for help, Father Paul encouraged his supporters to fund the tireless relief efforts of the Greek Catholic Bishop George Calavassy, who had recruited an English military chaplain working among the refugees, Msgr. Richard Barry-Doyle, to assist him in raising emergency relief funds in the United States.

In December 1924, Father Paul, Msgr. Barry-Doyle and a group of prominent Catholic laymen established in Philadelphia “the Catholic Near East Welfare Association” as a vehicle to assist Bishop Calavassy's work with the displaced Christians of the “Near East.” Msgr. Barry-Doyle's eloquent speaking program, entitled “The Call of the East,” packed concert halls across the United States — including Manhattan's Carnegie Hall — and raised significant funds for CNEWA to address the needs of the displaced in Constantinople.

Less than two years later, Pope Pius XI united several Catholic initiatives with similar goals — including Father Paul's CNEWA, of which he was vice president — into a single papal agency with its board of directors chaired ex officio by the archbishop of New York. The pope retained the name Catholic Near East Welfare Association, thereby centralizing and strengthening the various efforts for the Eastern churches throughout what was then called the Near East. In 2026, we will commemorate the founding of CNEWA as a program of the Holy See first led by Father Edmund Walsh, S.J.

Nearly a quarter of a century after Pope Pius XI founded CNEWA, his successor founded Pontifical Mission for Palestine in 1949.



CNEWA has assisted an innumerable number of people in its decades of service to the Eastern churches, including these girls at a displaced persons camp in Eritrea.

Pontifical Mission first coordinated worldwide Catholic aid to Palestinian refugees, hundreds of thousands of whom had fled their homes after the hasty departure of British troops from Mandatory Palestine in 1948. Pius XII placed the leadership and administration of Pontifical Mission, then understood as an ad hoc agency, under CNEWA. Subsequent pontiffs have extended and made permanent its mandate for the needs of all vulnerable persons throughout the Middle East.

Today, CNEWA directs its activities throughout the region through its Pontifical Mission office in Amman, which serves Iraq and Jordan; in Beirut, serving Lebanon and Syria; and in Jerusalem, serving in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

Throughout this year of anniversaries, we will look back and reproduce in these pages, and on our website at cnewa.org, some of our readers' favorite stories, as well as feature articles covering the historic and important events published in these pages over the past 50 years — 35 of which I have served in a variety of capacities, from editorial assistant to executive editor.

Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari, our publisher, and the entire team at CNEWA hope you find these features informative and inspiring, evidence of the resilience of the human spirit, the power of faith and how love can transform and transcend lives so sorely in need of it.

Michael J.L. La Civita is director of communications and executive editor of ONE.

Update From the Holy Land



Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari, CNEWA president, and staff of CNEWA's Jerusalem office visit with the Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Calvary in Jerusalem during his Christmas pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 18-27 December.

At the time of publication, war between Israel and Hamas continued, with the death toll in Gaza surpassing 28,000 people.

While CNEWA continues its provision of humanitarian aid to the churches in Gaza, the fluidity of the situation on the ground and resulting shortages has limited the availability and deliverability of aid, said Joseph Hazboun, regional director of CNEWA's Jerusalem office. However, his team "continues to follow up with the local Christian community" in Gaza and coordinate aid, providing food staples, heating fuel and medicines, he said.

Despite the war, Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari continued the longstanding tradition of CNEWA presidents and made a Christmas pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 18-27

Latin patriarch of Jerusalem.

"Right now, there is a need to end the violence. With the violence going on in Gaza, that must end. The hostages, every one of them, must be returned," said Msgr. Vaccari, outlining the priorities discussed with the papal nuncio and the patriarch. "And then, starting to rebuild."

As part of its mission, CNEWA will continue to foster dialogue and promote peace among Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land, as it has for the past 75 years, he added. Other priorities include developing educational resources on the Christian presence in the Holy Land and the rich history of Christianity in this ancestral land.

December. Bethlehem was near deserted of pilgrims this time, he said. He hosted the Christmas edition of "Connections With Msgr. Peter" from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, with Mr. Hazboun and Father Rami Asakrya, O.F.M., pastor of St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic Church in Bethlehem.

Msgr. Vaccari also celebrated Mass at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and visited CNEWA-supported programs, including the Collège des Frères in Jerusalem and Holy Family Hospital, and met with religious leaders, including Rabbi Noam Marans of the American Jewish Committee, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, papal nuncio, and Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa,

Ukraine War Enters Third Year

A peace agreement remains nowhere in sight in Ukraine, which entered its third year at war since Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022. To date, more than 10,000 civilians have been killed, 6.3 million people have fled Ukraine and 3.7 million are internally displaced.

CNEWA has distributed more than \$6.2 million in funding to its partners in Ukraine and surrounding countries to support their assistance to the displaced, with funds for shelter, food, medical care and job placement. Funding also supports schools, hospitals and other church-led institutions caring for the vulnerable.

Read how a CNEWA partner is helping children heal from the effects of war on **page 30**.

New Major Archbishop

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church elected a new shepherd. Major Archbishop Raphael Thattil was enthroned as the archbishop of

the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly on 11 January, succeeding Cardinal George Alencherry, who resigned in December.

Archbishop Thattil began his new ministry amid ongoing liturgical disputes and unrest within the Syro-Malabar Church, the second-largest Eastern church in full communion with the Church of Rome. The Syro-Malabar synod of bishops elected the former bishop of the Eparchy of Shamshabad — a vast ecclesial jurisdiction that covers 23 Indian states — on 9 January, and the pope confirmed the decision the next day. Many years!

Read how the church in India is working to adapt to the challenges in Indian society on [page 24](#).

Healing & Hope Gala

CNEWA's second annual "Healing & Hope" Gala in New York on 5 December raised \$467,000 in support of the agency's mission to the Eastern churches. More than 300 people came out for the dinner at a private club in Manhattan, which underlined the agency's commitment to support anti-trafficking efforts throughout the Middle East, Northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, CNEWA chair, presented the agency's Faith & Culture Award to anti-trafficking advocate John J. Studzinski, K.S.G., and honored Good Shepherd Sister Marie Claude Naddaf, a native of Syria, as its guest of honor.

Save the date! The next gala dinner will be on 5 December 2024.

CNEWA Concert for Peace

CNEWA cohosted a fundraising evening with St. Joseph by-the-Sea High School in Staten Island, New



The team in CNEWA's Rome office, Anna Cuzziol and Father Marco Scandelli, are working to advance the mission of the agency in Europe.

York, on 21 February. The Concert for Peace featured performances by several local Catholic schools and offered opportunities for the audience to learn about the agency's mission. To host a fundraising event for CNEWA in your community, visit cnewa.org/events.

CNEWA's Rome Office

The staff of CNEWA's office in Rome, which opened last summer in the historic building housing the Dicastery for Eastern Churches on the Via della Conciliazione, continues to build momentum in advancing awareness of this special initiative of the Holy See in Europe.

CNEWA's Rome team includes the Rev. Marco Scandelli, CNEWA's legal representative in Italy, and Anna Cuzziol, administrative officer. Together with Sabrina Zappia, consultant to the president, the team has organized and participated in several events to date.

In November, CNEWA cosponsored a conference on "Eastern Catholics' Ecumenical Vision in Dialogue With the Orthodox," and participated in a meeting of associations that support projects in the Holy Land. In January, Father Scandelli spoke at a conference on peace in the Holy Land. Msgr. Vaccari joined the team in mid-January for meetings with various Vatican dicasteries and offices.

There is even more on the web

Visit cnewa.org for updates

And find videos, stories from the field and breaking news at cnewa.org/blog



Pontifical Mission @75

Editors' note: To underline the 75th anniversary of the founding of Pontifical Mission, each edition of the magazine in this year of multiple anniversaries will feature at least one article on this special endeavor of the Holy See in the Middle East.

In the March edition, we feature the efforts of the Chaldean Church in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to rebuild the Christian community and its institutions, and to empower young adults to become leaders in the renewal of their country.

FUELED BY VISION AND FAITH

The church in Iraq empowers youth for leadership

text by Alex McKenna
with photographs by Yad Abdulqader

@75



Yousif Gawhar is quick to share about his relationship with Jesus. At 25, like many committed young adult Christians worldwide, he has pondered and questioned who Jesus is. Unlike most of them, his faith took shape in terror's wake.

Born in Baghdad, he fled the Iraqi capital with his family to Erbil, in the northern Kurdistan region, after his father's hotel was confiscated in 2005 and their lives were threatened. Mr. Gawhar inherited the faith from

his parents but, during years of violent persecution and the time that followed, he grew to make it his own.

Today, he lives in Ankawa, a largely Christian town five miles north of Erbil. Proficient in three languages — Arabic, English and Syriac — he is a senior human resources officer for an international nongovernmental organization.

Mr. Gawhar is a member of the Chaldean Church, an Eastern Catholic church of the East Syriac

rite that is indigenous to Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran and attributes its founding to the Apostle Thomas. He is a parishioner of the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Ankawa, where he volunteers as a catechist and participates in the St. Joseph Apostolic Work Fellowship, a group for young adults, some with faith journeys similar to his.

Young adults gather at the Chaldean Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Kirkuk, Iraq.



"I AM SO IMPRESSED WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EAGER TO SERVE THE CHURCH AND SERVE THE COMMUNITY WITHOUT ANYTHING IN RETURN."

Prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, nearly 1.5 million Christians lived in the country, according to the U.S. Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report on Iraq, and Chaldean Catholics were the most numerous.

However, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians fled the religious persecution that erupted during the Iraq War (2003-2011). Militant groups targeted Christian communities well into 2014, bombing 77 churches and religious buildings and killing at least 1,200 Christians, including Chaldean Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul and several priests.

The bloodshed and terror worsened in June 2014 with the rise of ISIS, which pillaged Christian

towns on the Nineveh Plain, destroyed churches, kidnapped women and killed innocent civilians. A third of Mosul — Iraq's second-largest city, which had a significant Chaldean population — was razed, and 13,220 Christian families from villages captured by ISIS were displaced. These families took what little they could carry and drove or hiked to the border with Kurdistan. There, they were ordered by government security to leave their vehicles and walk the remaining 12 miles to Erbil.

Mr. Gawhar recalls how the young people of Ankawa drove to the checkpoints to collect displaced persons and take them back to Ankawa, where they were sheltered in churches.

Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda visits with the staff at Maryamana Hospital, in Ankawa, founded by the Archeparchy of Erbil. Opposite, Dr. Daniella Hanna examines an elderly patient at Maryamana Hospital.

The brutal violence of ISIS against Christians, as well as Yazidis, has been recognized by members of the global community as genocide. Today, the total number of Christians in Iraq is less than 1 percent of the country's population estimated at 42 million. Chaldean Catholics remain the largest Christian community, with an estimated 250,000 faithful, according to the Iraqi Christian Foundation. However, most Chaldean Catholics currently live in the diaspora, with

The CNEWA Connection

the majority in the United States. Of the Christians who remain in Iraq, most live in Kurdistan.

In March 2021, Pope Francis did what was unimaginable just a few years earlier and made the first-ever papal visit to the country. Standing amid the rubble in Church Square in Mosul, he preached “harmonious coexistence” and prayed for the victims of war. The day prior, he visited with Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, a senior religious leader for Shiite Muslims, who made an uncommon public appearance for the occasion.

The pope’s visit allowed Iraq’s Christian community to display publicly the embers of hope and faith they had been fanning through more than a decade of intense fighting and persecution.

“It was a message of peace,” says Mr. Gawhar. “It was a message for Christians especially, that they’re not alone.”

The papal visit “gave hope” and had “a big impact, not just on Christian communities, but the whole community, the whole of Iraq,” he adds. “It brought every religion together.”

Mr. Gawhar is among several young Iraqis in the Archeparchy of Erbil who have held on to this spirit of hope, but who also express a measured concern for the future of the country and for the Chaldean community as a church on the periphery. The current culture tends to emphasize problems over solutions, he says, and he is only “10 percent hopeful about the future.”

Still, he says, he is part of “Team Stay.”

“My faith gives me hope for a better Iraq,” he adds. “I cannot imagine leaving Iraq. I will stay here until I’m kicked out.”

Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda, C.Ss.R., of Erbil is working to change the culture slowly with a solutions-based



The church in Iraq is small but strong in its witness and in the scope of its services for Christians and non-Christians alike. Today, as through successive periods of instability in the country, CNEWA continues to adapt its support to help the church meet the people’s changing needs. Operating as Pontifical Mission in the Middle East, CNEWA encourages the church’s efforts to form a new generation of Christian leaders through education, by supporting institutions of higher learning, including Babel College in Erbil. CNEWA’s funding also extends to child care programs, care for the elderly and people with disabilities.

To help CNEWA continue this work in Iraq, call: 1-800-442-6392 (United States) or 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or visit cnewa.org/where-we-work/middle-east/iraq.

approach. Since his enthronement in 2010, he has established several church-run institutions in his archeparchy, including a hospital, four elementary and high schools, the Catholic University in Erbil, and a few media projects, including a radio station. Together, these institutions employ more than 750 people, mostly young adults, aged 23-45, married and single. Archbishop Warda attributes the zeal of the young people employed in this work to providence.

“God wants us to stay [in Iraq] and he is directing the whole work, opening doors for us whenever we think it is almost done,” he says.

Young adults play an important role in the archbishop’s vision for regional peace and stability through education and economic

opportunity. The aim is “not just to enhance, but to empower the young people to take their role as leaders and contributors,” he says.

He pointed to the Ankawa Youth Meeting, held each year since 2013, as an important youth ministry effort for Chaldeans in Iraq. Participants leave strengthened by a community of faith and renewed in their spiritual lives by dynamic speakers, time in prayer and fellowship. In 2023, the weekend event drew more than 1,700 Chaldean young people from 60 parishes in seven eparchies.

“Maintaining this gathering for young people brings life to the church,” he says.

As part of the ongoing youth ministry and formation efforts, every parish in the archeparchy

also offers regular catechetical instruction to 1,200 children and teens, aged 5-18.

Vina Yousif, 26, has been serving as vice principal for two years at Mar Qardakh International School in Ankawa, founded by the archeparchy in 2010. Almost 600 Christian children receive English-language instruction in the school's International Baccalaureate program.

She studied catechesis and evangelization at Babel College. Founded in Baghdad in 1991, the college was moved to Erbil

for security reasons in 2007. It is affiliated with the Pontifical Urban University in Rome and offers theological formation for both laity and Chaldean Catholic seminarians.

Ms. Yousif leads the St. Joseph Apostolic Work Fellowship. Its members pray together, organize social gatherings, and assist with other needs at the cathedral. At a moment's notice, these young adults "will drop everything" to volunteer for a shift of 12 hours or more, she says.

"I am so impressed with the young people who are eager to

serve the church and serve the community without anything in return," she says.

Dr. Daniella Hanna, 26, is a junior resident physician at Maryamana Hospital, located across the street from the cathedral in Ankawa. Founded by the archeparchy in 2020 to serve people of all creeds — the hospital chapel and mosque were built side by side — the medical facility offers specialized care, including family medicine, a birthing center and surgery.

Dr. Hanna says her faith had grown lukewarm in years past, but

**"MY ASPIRATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY HERE IN IRAQ
IS TO HAVE A DEEP SENSE OF BELONGING."**



a personal crisis led her to recommit her life to Christ.

“He’s my very best friend. He listens to the whispers of my heart. He’s the leader of my life. He’s my shield. He’s my healer,” she says.

“When I had the chance to know Jesus, my outlook on everything changed. My perspective on life changed, and this has impacted my attitude and my behavior as a doctor and toward my patients,” she says.

Her “Christian role,” when faced with the suffering of her patients and their concerned family members, is “to give them hope, to do my best for them,” she says.

“I always believe that we are light and salt,” she says. “Each time I go to a different hospital and different staff, they immediately know that I’m a Christian. They start to tell me about their pain, their bad experiences. They trust me.”

She says the little hope she has for the future of Iraq is in its people and their ability “to give love, to spread love, honesty and kindness among citizens. That’s how we can build a better country and progress forward.”

Raaed Asaad travels 60 miles from Kirkuk, his hometown, to Erbil each way to study international relations at the Catholic University in Erbil (C.U.E.). Founded by the archeparchy in 2015, the university grants four-year degrees and welcomes students of all religious traditions, including Christian, Muslim and Yazidi.

Raised in a culture that places a premium on job attainment, Mr. Asaad says he found at C.U.E. the approach to learning he was seeking — one that privileges and develops freedom of thought and emphasizes the importance of

Raaed Asaad, seated next to a female student, speaks with friends at the Catholic University in Erbil.

coexistence in a society as diverse as Iraq.

“Our path of learning makes our dreams and shapes our personality,” he says.

He adds that his Christian faith and the Chaldean Church are important to his identity. To be a Christian in Iraq is to be a person of peace, to promote peace and tolerance, and to contribute to society, he explains.

“My aspiration for the Christian community here in Iraq is to have a deep sense of belonging,” he says. “This place, this cradle of civilization faced a lot of atrocities, wars and all of these difficulties, but I hope to keep the belief that this is our place, this is our land.”

Despite the robust church-run institutions intended to sow hope and encourage Christians to remain in Iraq, the fears of Chaldean youth are not lost on Archbishop Warda.

“To be honest, there is always fear about the future,” he says. “Our young people — despite all these anxieties, worries about the future — are full of hope. They love life. They try to make the best of it.”

“They give time to prayer and other church activities and take care of building their capacities to get a good job. They try to better themselves.”

Archbishop Warda adds that his vision for his church includes more than providing good jobs and security for Iraq’s Christian youth. It is in building up young people that the Chaldean Church will endure in Iraq, he says, and with it the hope that only Christ can bring.

“If we left, who would bring Christ to Iraq? Who would be the light of Christ to the people here, if not us?”

Alex McKenna teaches in and writes from Erbil, Iraq. Yad Abdulqader, a video journalist in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, contributed to this report.



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Blasts jarred Soliyana Samuel awake. It was a Wednesday morning, 2 August, in Gondar, a city known for its historic castles and fortresses in Ethiopia's northern Amhara region. Ms. Samuel's mother ran to the neighbors to find out the source of the noise.

To their dismay, a fierce exchange of gunfire had erupted less than a mile away, on Goha Hill, in plain view from their home. In the moments that followed, the truth settled heavily on their hearts — the armed conflict that had begun in the Amhara region four months prior had intensified.

Two days later, amid the escalating conflict, Ethiopia's central government declared a six-month regional state of emergency. The heavy fighting blocked roads, severely impeding the delivery of goods and making travel dangerous for civilians.

Ms. Samuel, a third-year student at Injibara University, was home on a semester break at the time. Her school, located about 175 miles south of Gondar, was among 10 universities in the region to announce the immediate and indefinite suspension of classes. In total, about 2,000 schools were closed, impacting 2.5 million children and young people. About 42 school buildings were significantly damaged in the fighting.

Several regions in Ethiopia have experienced periods of fierce violence and civil unrest in recent years. The Tigray conflict (2020-2022) in the country's northernmost region between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front killed about 600,000 people and displaced about 2.5 million. A peace agreement was signed in November 2022, and more than 1 million people have returned to Tigray.

"However, the implementation of the peace process is so slow," says Argaw Fantu, director of CNEWA's regional office in Ethiopia. "Families of young people who lost their lives in the miscalculated war have not been properly consoled and supported. Young people seem hopeless. Lawlessness in some parts of the region is the biggest fear of people, as silent attacks and robberies are happening in many places."

The two-year conflict damaged farmlands, drought increased food insecurity, and children have dropped out of school due to lack of food, he says. Catholic churches are seeking to start their meal programs for children, usually slated for the summer, in an effort to save lives, he adds.

The Amhara region, which borders Tigray to the south, had allied with the federal forces during the Tigray conflict. However, the federal government's decision in April 2023 to integrate all regional special forces into the national defense force triggered widespread violent protests. Inhabitants in Amhara interpreted the decision as an attempt to diminish regional autonomy and feared it would make them more vulnerable to attacks from other regional groups.

Regional security forces in Amhara refused to disband and took up arms, as did the Fano, a militia that claims to represent the Amhara people, Ethiopia's second-largest ethnic community. Reports issued by the United Nations indicate this conflict has killed more than 230 people.

By mid-January, relative peace had been restored to the Amhara region, and the universities announced classes would resume in February. Ms. Samuel was looking forward to returning to her studies in food science and post-harvest technology.





Hope for a Peaceful Future

Caring for youth in Ethiopia's
ongoing regional conflicts

by Hikma A. Abdulmejid

In Gondar, Ethiopia, increased security marked this year's celebrations on 19 January for the eve of Timkat, the feast of the baptism of Jesus.

The CNEWA Connection



CNEWA's longstanding support of the church in Ethiopia has been at the service of the country's most vulnerable. CNEWA's commitment has been recognized by church leaders, including Bishop Lesanuchristos Matheos Semahun of Bahir Dar-Dessie, whose eparchy includes areas of the country currently undergoing armed conflict and civil unrest. Despite years of strife and natural disasters, the bishop says, the church in Ethiopia knows it can rely on CNEWA's continuous solidarity and support for its pastoral and humanitarian work, including for its schools, food programs, university chaplaincies and priestly formation.

**Help the church in Ethiopia that is relying on our support.
Call 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or 1-800-442-6392
(United States) or visit: [cnewa.org/where-we-work/
northeast-africa/ethiopia](http://cnewa.org/where-we-work/northeast-africa/ethiopia).**

However, many of her peers had given up hope that school would restart and dropped out.

During the suspension of classes, Ms. Samuel got involved with the local university chaplaincy program, run by the Cistercian monks. The chaplaincy operates in a church located on the grounds of Debre Selam Mariam Catholic School.

"We provide them with spiritual guidance and teachings every Sunday, especially on how to cope with the conflict using the sacred words of God," says Father Tamiru Adugna, O.Cist., who has served in Gondar since 2017.

The chaplaincy also supports university students by covering transportation costs to and from

Sunday liturgy, offering breakfast along with their programming, and providing assistance for new clothes or other items on special occasions, such as graduation.

In the previous academic year, the chaplaincy accompanied 34 students from the nearby University of Gondar and Debark University. Although the chaplaincy program could not restart last October as usual, due to the suspension of classes, the monks have kept in regular contact with those students who are waiting at home, in various parts of the country, for classes to resume.

"We are greeting each other, and we are encouraging them," he says.

In addition to serving with the university chaplaincy, Father

Adugna is the chairman of the board of Debre Selam Mariam Catholic School. The private school was founded by Comboni Missionaries in 1961 and transferred to the Cistercians in 1980. Currently, it has 160 staff members and 3,300 students, from kindergarten to grade 12.

"Despite the challenges, we consistently excel in national examinations," he says. "In the school, we focus on moral education, adapting to recent changes in the government program. Our unique environment fosters inclusivity, welcoming students of all backgrounds."

With the regional crisis, the school faced delays in acquiring educational materials and families have had difficulty paying tuition on time.

"Adapting to the situation, we collaborate with families to address challenges, emphasizing the need for peace to ensure a conducive learning environment. Despite these difficulties, we maintain hope for a peaceful future and normalcy in our educational services," he says.

"As monks and as priests, we are praying for peace in the region for everybody."

In Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara region, about 105 miles south of Gondar, Bishop Lesanuchristos Matheos Semahun of Bahir Dar-Dessie speaks of the struggles faced by communities caught in the crossfire: a lack of access to water, food, electricity and means of communication.

The road blockades severely hampered the church's pastoral

Blessed Gebremichael Catholic School in Bahir Dar enrolls students from kindergarten to grade 12.

At right, students in an upper grade attend class. Top left, Sister Weinitu Woldesenbet teaches students the alphabet.

activities. The Ethiopian Catholic Eparchy of Bahir Dar-Dessie was established in 2015. Its vast territory, with an estimated population of about 23 million, extends beyond the Amhara region and includes the Afar region to the east and the Benishangul-Gumuz region to the west, where armed conflict surfaced in 2019.

“We are passing from one war to another war, from conflict to conflict. Especially in this area, it is a continuous problem,” he says. “All of this conflict and war is between brothers and sisters. No one came from the outside.”

Although Catholics are a minority in the region, the bishop underlines, the eparchy operates more than 20 schools, including a school for children who are blind, and 44 medical centers.

“Our presence has two dimensions,” he says. “One is a witness, and another is service.”

**“All of this conflict and war is
between brothers and sisters.
No one came from the outside.”**

Due to security concerns, the bishop ordained two priests outside the eparchy in the Roman Catholic Apostolic Vicariate of Jimma-Bonga in southwestern Ethiopia.

Young women have suffered the greatest adverse effects of the conflict, he says. Confined to their homes in dire situations, many were forced into early marriages and, as a result, dropped out of school.

The conflict has had traumatic effects on children, especially orphans, he adds. He expressed concern about the mental illness

the conflict was precipitating in children, including depression and mental breakdown.

The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul work with children experiencing the trauma brought on by conflict at Blessed Gebremichael Catholic School in Bahir Dar. About 1,200 students, from kindergarten to high school, are enrolled at the day school, which includes a nursery and a day care.

Sister Weinitu Woldesenbet, D.C., the school administrator, recalls the



“Our presence has two dimensions.
One is a witness, and another is service.”



day two bombs fell on Bahir Dar, one perilously close to the school. Students and parents became frantic.

“When something [unsettling] has happened around us, they shout, they cry, they look for the older ones, and they run here and there. ‘What is happening, Sister? What is going on?’ These kinds of questions are very challenging for us,” she says. “We are afraid for their psychological health, and we are afraid for their future.”

The school was temporarily closed, and students hesitated to return. However, a directive from the municipal government mandated the school to reopen, promising them added security.

Nigist Aslake, the secretary, underlines the school’s commitment to equal access to education, with tuition ranging from 100 birr to 600 birr (\$2 to \$11). Students are provided meals daily and those in need receive financial support in the form of sponsorships and tuition assistance.

Many of the students are orphans, whose parents either died of AIDS or were killed in an armed conflict. Other children come from low-income or single-parent homes.

Sister Weinitu says the school is well loved by the local community, but the staff is unable to accept more students due to lack of space.

The sisters also offer a sewing workshop at the school for adults. Upon completion of the program, the school provides the graduates with sewing machines to foster self-sufficiency, empower them to start their own businesses and contribute to the local economy. In their 35 years of service in Bahir Dar, the sisters also funded the construction

of more than 200 homes for the poorest families in the community.

Poverty in the Amhara region — already higher than the national average prior to 2020 — has been exacerbated by civil unrest, but also by soaring inflation and unemployment rates.

“Students want to stop their study because of the economic crisis,” says Father Adugna, adding that inflation has also made it difficult to pay teacher salaries at Debre Selam Mariam Catholic School.

Inflation has impeded the pastoral and humanitarian work of the Eparchy of Bahir Dar-Dessie as well, as some basic expenses have tripled in cost, says Bishop Matheos. Furthermore, while the church continues to walk with those who suffer, donations from abroad, on which Ethiopia is heavily dependent, have been more difficult to come by as other conflicts around the world, such as the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, have captured a great deal of attention.

“All we have is our good will, our good heart, our compassion, our humanity. We are people who live with them, and we share what we have with them,” he says about the church’s work with the poor. “But we are really 100 percent sure the providence of God will come.”

Addressing the armed conflicts within the territory of his eparchy again, the bishop reiterates his observation that there is “no enemy who came from abroad. It is all brothers and sisters, we among ourselves, who are fighting.”

“Hopefully, with the help of the prayer of many people, mainly ourselves, it will stop, and we will live the way we lived before — peacefully.”

Father Tamiru Adugna addresses the student body at Debre Selam Mariam Catholic School in Gondar during the school’s Christmas celebration, 5 January.

Hikma A. Abdulmejid is a freelance journalist in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Photojournalist Petterik Wiggers in Addis Ababa contributed to this report.



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one@50

Editors' note: To underline ONE's 50th anniversary in 2024, each issue of the magazine will feature a reprint of a ONE "classic" — an article that continues to capture the attention and interest of readers worldwide years after its publication.

In this March edition, we feature a piece by Rabbi Michael Lerner, first published in January 2006. Rabbi Lerner of Beyt Tikkun Synagogue in Berkeley is also founding editor of Tikkun magazine. Eighteen years ago, his reflection on what constitutes fair and unfair criticism of Israeli governing policies was in response to Israel's forced evacuation of Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005. While the circumstances have changed, his piece offers points and perspectives for consideration in the current context of the war between Israel and Hamas.

Antisemitism and Criticizing ISRAEL

by Rabbi Michael Lerner

There is nothing inherently antisemitic about criticizing Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people, but there are ways of making those criticisms antisemitic.

Jews did not return to Palestine to be oppressors or representatives of colonialism and cultural imperialism. It is true that some 19th- and early 20th-century Zionist leaders sought to portray their movement as a way to serve the interests of countries in Europe, the birthplace of Zionism. Moreover, many Jews who came brought with them a Western arrogance that made it possible for them to see Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land" and virtually ignore the Arabs of Palestine and their cultural and historical rights.

The Jewish people who shaped Israel (which declared its independence in 1948) in its early years were jumping from the burning buildings of Europe. And when they landed on the backs of the indigenous Arabs, Palestinians,

they were so transfixed with their own pain that they could not be bothered to notice they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state. Subsequently, many of these Jews would deny their role in creating Palestinian refugees, who would dream of their own "return" just as we Jews did for some 1,800 years.

This Jewish insensitivity to the pain of others was also abetted by the actions of Arab leaders prior to and after the creation of Israel. As Jewish and Arab nationalism collided, atrocities were committed on both sides. Many Jews cannot forget the attacks on Jewish communities beginning in 1880 and culminating in the massacre of dozens of religious Jews in Hebron in 1929. (It is worth remembering that Jews and Arabs had been living peacefully in Hebron for hundreds of years.) And even as the Holocaust unfolded, Arab leaders, backed by the British authorities who then administered Palestine, denied Jewish pleas for entry.

Eventually, after three wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, most Palestinians had acknowledged the reality of Israel and the need to accommodate it in order to make possible their own self-determination.

But it was too late. By then, most Jews and Israelis clung to the notion — a powerful misperception of reality — that their state could be wiped out at any moment unless they exercised the utmost vigilance. Drenched in the memories of the Holocaust, in their seemingly eternal status as victim, Jews were unable to recognize that they had become the most powerful state in the region. They have used this sense of imminent doom to justify their occupation of the West Bank and Gaza for over 30 years. (Gaza was handed over to the Palestinian Authority in August 2005.)

Israel, Occupation and Judaism

Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories can only be maintained by what has become an international scandal: the violation of basic human rights of the occupied; the documented and widespread use of torture; the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes; the seizure of Palestinian lands for West Bank settlements created to undermine the possibility of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank; and the transformation of Israeli politics into a system where verbal violence begot real violence, most notably in the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

To enable this occupation, Israeli society has degraded itself. Such distortions are on display in the perverse racism exhibited toward

Top, people gather in Tel Aviv, 24 November, as they wait for news on the release of Israeli hostages by Hamas. Bottom, demonstrators outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington on 18 October call for a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas.



Arabs. Thus, all Palestinians are blamed for the terrorist actions of a small minority. Also, Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent have been treated as second-class citizens. To take just one example, less public money is allocated to Arab East Jerusalem or to Israeli Arabs than to the rest of Jerusalem.

Anti-Arab sentiment also spills over into divisions among Jews. There has been a refusal to redress the social inequalities between Ashkenazic (Western and Eastern European) Jews and Sephardic (Iberian) Jews and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jews. Furthermore, both Israel's Labor and Likud parties are willing to make electoral deals with ultra-Orthodox parties intent on using state power to foist religious control over Israelis' personal lives and to grab a disproportionate share of state revenues.

But perhaps the greatest victim of all these distortions has been Judaism itself.

Historically, one strand of Judaism has affirmed the possibility of healing the world and transcending its violence and cruelty. Another has seen the "other" — be it the Greeks, Romans, Christians or Arabs — as inherently evil, beyond redemption and deserving of violence. I call the latter strand "Settler Judaism." It reflects the ideology of settling the land as exemplified both in the Book of Joshua (and in some quotes in the Torah) and in the reckless acts of many Israelis.

However, this settler ideology has played a necessary part in keeping the Jewish community psychologically healthy throughout the long period in our history when Jews were oppressed and brutalized by imperial occupiers and our "hosts" in Europe. For many years, Christians systematically demeaned Jews in their Good Friday services as "killers of God" and portrayed them in their iconography as beasts

with tails and horns. Periodically, Jews were rounded up and deported (from England, France, Spain and Portugal) or murdered (during the Crusades, the Black Plague, the Inquisition and many other periods). In the face of such persecution, Jews needed a way to sustain their own sense of self-worth. Thus, they saw themselves as chosen by God, suffering to keep God's word alive. One day, Jews maintained, God would rectify the

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There is nothing inherently antisemitic about criticizing Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people, but there are ways of making those criticisms antisemitic.
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situation, defeat all their enemies and lead them back to their homeland.

Just as African Americans once needed to proclaim, "Black is beautiful," and feminists embraced the rallying cry of "sisterhood," so too did Jews need a vision of strength.

But today, when Jews rule over an occupied people and live in the West in affluence among our non-Jewish neighbors, the supremacist ideas of Settler Judaism can only appeal to

those trapped in the notion that we are eternally vulnerable.

For a new generation of Jews, raised in circumstances of power and success, a Judaism based on fear and cruelty, a Judaism used to justify Jewish power and occupation, is a Judaism that has very little spiritual appeal. Ironically, the need to be a handmaiden to Israel distorts Judaism and creates a crisis of continuity, as younger Jews seek spiritual insight outside their inherited tradition.

The other strand of Judaism, "Renewal Judaism," takes its inspiration from the prophets and has reasserted itself in every major age of Jewish life. It insists that the God of the Torah is a force of healing and transformation and that our task is not to sanctify existing power relations but to challenge them in the name of world peace and justice.

Perhaps the greatest danger Israel poses to the Jewish people is the extent to which it has helped Jews become cynical about their central task: to proclaim to the world the "possibility of possibility" and to affirm the God of the universe as the force that makes it possible to stop inflicting on others the violence and cruelty that were done to them. In other words, to make possible the transcendence of "reality" as it is so that a new world can be shaped. If Israel is ever to be healed, it will only be when it is able to reject this slavish subordination to political realism and once again embrace the transformative spiritual message of renewal.

Criticizing Israel

Criticism of Israeli policy toward Palestinians is fundamentally legitimate. There is nothing antisemitic about noting that the recent withdrawal from Gaza was done in the most destructive way possible because its goal was not to jump-start but to stop a peace process: Sacrificing 9,000 settlers to

create a horrific scene in Gaza showed the world how painful it was to uproot settlers. How could Israel uproot 300,000 settlers in the West Bank?

But there was no need to uproot settlers. In a genuine peace accord, settlers would have been allowed to stay in the West Bank and Gaza if they agreed to live as Palestinian citizens governed by Palestinian law. Those who wished to move back to Israel would have done so by choice, not as part of a forced evacuation.

Exposing manipulations to retain control over Palestinians, critiquing the policies of occupation and those who abet them, insisting that Western countries pressure Israel to end the occupation of the West Bank — there is nothing antisemitic about that. In fact, doing so is a favor to the Jewish people and should be warmly welcomed by those of us in the Jewish world who see the best interests of the Jewish people as intrinsically tied to an openhearted reconciliation with the Palestinian people.

Still, there are elements of antisemitism that I have encountered in the way criticisms are made, and friends of the Jewish people ought to avoid them.

Here are some examples. Singling out Israel as the focus of criticism: The truth is that Israel's disrespect for Palestinian human rights is not the worst example of human rights violations in the world. Israel pales behind the policies of some nations in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. When progressives in Western countries with heavily Christian populations single out Israel for special emphasis without extending these same criticisms of even worse human rights violators, they give a *prima facie* appearance of being antisemitic.

Similarly, disinvestment campaigns that focus on Israel (increasingly popular on the campuses of the nation's elite universities) that do

not call for similar steps against other human rights violators could be interpreted as antisemitic.

Using a double standard: Jews in the Israeli peace movement call for an end to the occupation, meaning a return to the pre-1967 borders of Israel. But there are people in the West and in the Arab world who, when they speak of "occupation," mean the very existence of Israel. They call for Israel's existence to be ended. Yet

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no other country's right to exist is called into question based on the policies that underlie its creation. Those who question Israel's legitimacy must also question the legitimacy of the United States, for example, whose creation came on the heels of the killing of most of the Native American population and the enslavement of African Americans. But those who question Israel's legitimacy rarely hold other countries to the same standards.

I believe that the primary anger against Jews in the world today derives from legitimate anger directed against Israeli policy toward Palestinians and is no longer derived primarily from the long historical legacy of Christian teachings against the Jews. Nevertheless, the anger toward a specific state is all too often expressed against all Jews, though many Jews both in Israel and elsewhere oppose Israeli policies. I believe that Jews remain vulnerable to this kind of racism and that we may again be subject to waves of antisemitism. Throughout history, elites have used Jews to deflect anger that otherwise might be directed at them.

But I also believe that the Jewish people have a major responsibility to dissociate themselves publicly and unequivocally from the policies of Palestinian occupation. We must reject the teachings of Settler Judaism and use whatever political influence we can muster to create a viable Palestinian state living in peace with Israel.

The consistent distortions about Palestinians and the systematic denial of Israel's human rights violations create a deep divide among Jews. Those Jews who are weaned on Jewish papers and magazines and the pulpit orations of many synagogues may not be aware of their distorted view of reality. To break through this wall of misinformation and denial is very difficult, particularly given the tendency of Jewish leaders to label as "antisemitic" anyone who seeks to challenge their perspective.

While such views should be challenged, I also believe the best way to do so is with compassion.

Critics of Israel should also acknowledge the Jewish narrative about our own history and the long history of abuse Jews have suffered. It is only by acknowledging one another's pain that we may begin to relieve it. ■

A photograph of a busy street in India, likely a market area. The street is lined with shops and buildings. On the left, there's a large HP logo on a building. In the center, a green sign for 'Punjab & Sind Bank' is visible, with an 'ATM' sign below it. To the right, a red sign for 'DATA RECOVERY REPAIR UPGRADE LAPTOP MOBILE COMPUTER ANAND' is prominent. The street is crowded with people, mostly men, walking. The background shows more buildings and signs, creating a sense of a bustling urban environment.

Persevering in Changing Times

The church in India responds to societal shifts, rising secularism

by Anubha George



India, once widely regarded as a land that promoted peaceful coexistence, has seen an uptick in violence against religious minorities in recent years, including Christians, who make up less than 3 percent of the country's population.

Last spring, violence erupted in Manipur between the majority Hindu Meitei people and the predominantly Christian Kuki people. The northeastern Indian state, which borders with Myanmar, is led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.), which is also the ruling party in India's Parliament.

While Manipur's history of ethnic conflict began prior to India's independence in 1947, the violence reported in May 2023 saw villages burned down. About 300 churches were set ablaze in the violence and another 100 buildings belonging to Christian communities, including a theological college, were destroyed.

The latest figures, published in January, indicate about 200 people on both sides of the conflict were killed. Of these, at least 87 were Kuki Christians. The communal violence displaced about 50,000 people, mostly Christians.

Despite frequent news reports of communal violence in the country, annual statistics published by India's National Crime Records Bureau in December 2023 for the previous year show incidents of communal violence on the decline, with only 272 registered cases in 2022, down from 378 in 2021, and 857 the year prior. The same bureau reported 438 cases in 2019, 512 in 2018, and 723 in 2017. Figures for 2023 were not available at the time of publication.

While the government is reporting communal rioting at an all-time low,

Nehru Place in Delhi is the largest computer and accessories market in India and a major I.T. hub in South Asia.

some Indian media are reporting ethnic tensions at an all-time high.

"In Kerala, things are okay for now," says the Rev. Peter Kannampuzha of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. "We're not affected by hate speech or communalism. But we are worried about what's happened in Manipur, the attacks on churches."

Father Kannampuzha is the director of catechesis and moral education for the archeparchy, situated in the southern state of

Kerala, more than 2,000 miles from Manipur. Still, any religious persecution feels close to home for India's minority Christian community.

"When incidents like Manipur happen, it gives us some anxiety," he says. "As Christians, we pray for peace, harmony and progress of the nation."

Father Kannampuzha says changes in religious sentiment in the country, as well as to family life in general, have impacted the way the church teaches the faith and trains lay ministers.

The biggest social change has been the nuclear family replacing

the more traditional extended Indian family, where at least three generations live together.

Increasingly now, a nanny will look after young children rather than their grandparents. Men and women are waiting longer to marry and have children. Women have become more financially independent, greater affluence has brought a rise in consumer culture, and an increasing number of young people are going abroad for school or work.

"As the needs of Christian families in India change, the church also has to evolve," says Father

**"As Christians, we pray for peace,
harmony and progress of the nation."**



The CNEWA Connection

The program of study for the Franciscan seminarians at Kolbe Ashram Seminary in Millupady includes learning to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. Opposite, Father Peter Kannampuzha visits a catechism class for teens in Kerala.

Kannampuzha. “Where the smartphone has replaced time together at family meals, we need to bring family members together at liturgy. Where grandparents are no longer present, catechists must replace the wisdom of the elderly.”

The archeparchy organizes regular meetings, retreats and training programs in each of its 16 deaneries for 5,287 volunteer catechists, mostly lay people, including many women with professional careers. Father Kannampuzha oversees this training, as well as the archeparchy’s 306 catechism classes, with a total enrollment of 65,206 children and teens.

“We have interactive sessions on how catechism should be taught in today’s society,” he explains. “We talk about the church’s vision; how to handle the children and our responsibilities as Christians and as citizens of India.”

“We always want our catechists to feel supported. The church takes the training of lay ministers very seriously because they’re the ones doing the church’s work,” he adds.

In response to religious tensions in the country, the church is working to promote communal harmony and secularism, understood in India as the equality of all individuals regardless of religious affiliation or belief.

“We encourage children to love God and their fellow human beings irrespective of religion or race,” he says.

To practice putting such love into action, the archeparchy has introduced the “Adopt a Family”



A key aspect of CNEWA’s mission is to support the pastoral initiatives of the Eastern churches, including catechism, seminary formation and the formation of religious men and women. CNEWA has long supported such initiatives in southern India, even as the church there has adapted its programming in recent years to respond to the needs of a rapidly evolving society, marked by an increase in secularism and anti-religious sentiment, as well as changes in family life.

To support the mission of the church in India, call 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or 1-800-442-6392 (United States) or visit cnewa.org/where-we-work/india.

program. High school juniors in the catechism program are put into groups to care for local families in need who may not share their religious beliefs. They will assist these families for two years with food, medicine and clothing.

“Students take up part-time jobs to support their chosen family,” says Father Kannampuzha. “This is a great way for them to learn about caring, sharing and doing God’s work.”

High school seniors instead participate in a program called “Karuthal,” a Malayalam word that means “caring.” They are encouraged to share their meal at Christmas with a family in need.

“We talk to the students about the happiness that comes from helping and sacrificing for others,” Father Kannampuzha says. “As Christians,

they have to know about the Gospel and how to apply it to day-to-day life.”

“We develop our catechism students into leaders,” he adds. “Leadership in school, politics, education and in church is important.”

Community relations in Millupady, a predominantly Muslim neighborhood in Aluva, about 10 miles northeast of Ernakulam, were not always cordial, says Father Paul Pothanattuvelayil, O.F.M. Conv. The priest serves as rector of the Kolbe Ashram Seminary of the Conventual Franciscans in Millupady.

He recalls how a natural disaster helped turn things around. In 2018, Kerala was devastated by the



heaviest rainfall in close to a century. At least 400 people died in the floods and many more went missing.

“We invited everybody to seek shelter at the seminary. About 300 Muslim families were here as the rains lashed and people lost their homes,” he says. “People stayed here as long as they wanted. We gave them food, clothes and medicines.”

The seminary continued to help even after life went back to normal.

“That changed everything. People understood we were decent and here to help,” he says.

These days, Muslim couples come to the seminary gardens to take their wedding pictures.

“We’re all very friendly,” he says.

As the Indian population continues to grow and its society evolves, the need for understanding, tolerance and dialogue among faith communities increases, he insists.

“In India, the needs of the community are changing fast,” he says. “Gone are the days when a town or village was homogenous. Communities are more mixed now. We have to deal with conflict with sympathy and empathy.

“The church understands that. We are engaging more with other communities. Dialogue is much needed and more rigorous.”

Priestly formation must also respond to the ways in which societal changes in India have impacted seminary candidates, says the rector.

“Young boys and men have so much exposure to the world these days, thanks to their smartphones. There’s more awareness of what they want, how they can achieve

Sister Reshma, center, is the novice mistress for four novices discerning with the Sisters of Nazareth in south Angamaly.

"We encourage children to love God and their fellow human beings irrespective of religion or race."

their goals," he says. "It is now very difficult to convince a young man to live a life of service where the first thing you need to give up during training is your smartphone."

Better role models are needed for a new generation of clergy, he adds.

"We need formators who are human, vulnerable, open and who don't shy away from dialogue. Young seminarians need care and someone to understand their concerns and dilemmas. Gone are the days of strict priests and shouting orders."

Sister Reshma, C.S.N., is the novice mistress for four novices at Nazareth Novitiate House in south Angamaly. The 40-year-old convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth is very quiet, except for the occasional train that rolls by.

"Once upon a time, the novices used to join young, when they were 15 or 16 years old," Sister Reshma says. "Now, they're older. They come to us after they've gotten their undergraduate degree and in some cases after their post-grad."

Sister Reshma receives guidance from local bishops on the formation program and syllabus for novices, which place more emphasis now on self-awareness and psychological well-being compared with years past. As part of a new initiative, a senior sister will visit with novices weekly to check on their mental health and well-being.

"This is by far the most important support we provide to young women who will go on to do Christ's work," Sister Reshma says. "We've found that novices need more empathy, support, affection

and understanding from us than ever before."

Sister Reshma has observed how changes in Christian families in India have impacted vocations and vocational formation.

"Not so long ago, spiritual formation started at home, families prayed and did the rosary together. Not so much anymore," she says. "These days, more people are wounded and deal with trauma caused by their circumstances and families, for example, being abused as a child."

Furthermore, as career options for young women have increased in India, "being a sister has fallen way down that list. Women have to come to view service also as a career option."

The formation program at the novitiate also gives "a lot of importance to secularism," says Sister Reshma.

"India is a country of billions and there are varied communities and religions. We prepare our novices not just for a life of the Gospel, but also how to deal with difficult circumstances that exist in our country."

In an effort to engage more directly with the diversity of people and cultures in the local neighborhood, the sisters have taken baby steps toward greater dialogue and opportunities for encounter, including opening the convent chapel every Sunday to people of all faiths to come and pray.

"We don't turn people away," the sister says. "Everybody is welcome, no matter who they are."

Anubha George is a writer and former BBC editor in Kerala.



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Learn about how the church in India has adapted its faith formation initiatives to address current needs in a video at

cnewa.org/one

Healing THE Trauma OF War

Children in Ukraine find hope and healing after years of loss

text by Kateryna Malofieieva
with photographs by Konstantin Chernichkin





RESPONDING TO HUMAN NEEDS

Caritas centers across Ukraine offer programming for displaced children that fosters community, friendship and creative expression, which help in healing trauma.

“ IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO
BE EMOTIONALLY CLOSE,
TO PLAY, TO make IT CLEAR
THAT we are STILL alive,
and everything IS normal.”



The CNEWA Connection

The cobbled streets of Lviv, blanketed with soft, freshly fallen snow, had an unusual semblance of calm for a Saturday in mid-January. An air raid alert had — once again — suspended life in western Ukraine's cultural capital and emptied its streets of their normal bustle for more than an hour.

Then, a man's voice over the city's P.A. system broke the mandated stillness: "Attention. The air raid alert is over. Leave the shelter of civil protection. Help children and the elderly. Return to your homes and places of work."

Within moments, a group of teens and their teachers filed out of a government building, where they had been taking shelter. Once out in the open, the teens dispersed and began throwing snowballs at each other. The snowballs flew for the entire 10-minute walk back to their base — the two-story building that houses Caritas Lviv.

Caritas Lviv is one of 40 centers of Caritas Ukraine, the charity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. Russia's war on the country brought new challenges for Caritas Lviv, starting in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and its occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and culminating with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

At both times, but more so in 2022, Caritas Lviv transformed into a distribution point of humanitarian aid, as Lviv became a main transit hub for Ukrainians fleeing the country and an important host city for internally displaced people.

According to the United Nations, as of 10 January, the two-year war

A displaced mother and her children live in housing provided by Caritas Dnipro. Top right, the after school program for displaced children at Caritas Lviv includes cooking classes.



In the two years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, CNEWA has distributed more than \$6.2 million to its longstanding partners in Ukraine and surrounding countries, responding to the needs of both refugees and internally displaced people. The agency's support to these partners, including Caritas Ukraine, Ukrainian Catholic University and the curia of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, has provided food packages, psychosocial support, education and housing to the displaced and vulnerable. CNEWA is also supporting Caritas Ukraine in its initiatives to address the trauma and health consequences of war on children.

To support this critical work, at such a critical time, call 1-866-322-4441 (Canada) or 1-800-442-6392 (United States) or visit cnewa.org/work/ukraine.

created 6.3 million refugees, internally displaced 3.7 million people, killed at least 10,233 civilians and injured more than 19,200.

Children have paid a high price in this war. At least 575 children are among the dead and 1,260 are among the injured. More than 2 million children are counted among the refugees, and about 1 million are numbered among the internally displaced, leaving nearly two-thirds of all Ukrainian children homeless.

Children in Ukraine are without adequate access to education and health care, as schools, hospitals, and sources of water and energy have been damaged or destroyed. According to the Ukrainian government, more than 3,790 educational facilities have been

damaged or destroyed since February 2022.

Furthermore, the Children of War state portal reports that about 19,500 Ukrainian children have been abducted and forcibly deported to Russia, where their names have been changed, they are subjected to indoctrination, the use of the Ukrainian language is prohibited, and they are placed under Russian guardianship. By mid-January, only 517 of these children were repatriated, according to Dmytro Lubinets, Ukraine's parliament commissioner for human rights.

With no end to the war in sight, the impact on the mental health and well-being of Ukrainian children has become a growing concern. According to UNICEF, an estimated 1.5 million children are at

risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, with potential long-term effects.

Caritas Ukraine recognized the need to mitigate the war's impact on children early on. By April 2022, only two months into the war, the team at Caritas Lviv had organized child-friendly spaces in dormitories for internally displaced people. Sofia Zotina, a psychologist at Caritas Lviv, recalls the mass migration of people at that time. Children would be in Lviv one day and gone the next.

Zoriana Lukavetska, who leads Caritas Ukraine's programming for children and youth, says a child's psyche is quite resilient and can cope with stress, so long as a stable adult is available nearby to turn to for help. However, Ukrainian parents are experiencing their own war-related trauma and life challenges — many of them as single mothers with their husbands fighting on the front — as they look for jobs and try to establish their families in a new city.

Since 2022, 35 Caritas centers across Ukraine, staffed with psychologists, tutors and therapists, have been providing services for children that seek to fill this gap by offering children a safe space to acquire new skills, socialize with their peers, and learn techniques to cope with the trauma of war and loss. To date, the centers have welcomed 152,000 children and 2,250 parents.

While all Caritas centers use a common evidence-based approach in their work with children and their consultations with parents, each center organizes its own social and extracurricular activities. The center in Lviv, for instance, offers cooking lessons for the children that parents can join.


Children who have experienced trauma and severe stress may

exhibit changes in their behavior and learning abilities, as well as setbacks in their emotional and physical development. Socializing with other children also can become difficult.

Ms. Zotina in Lviv says it can take these children a long time to form bonds of trust and express their feelings. She recalls some children who eventually admitted not wanting to become friends with

others for fear that they may “lose these people.” Others expressed fear about their father or brother fighting on the front line. Some said they were frightened by air raid sirens, and others were unhappy “because they spent four weeks in a basement until they could leave Mariupol,” she says.

Maria Metsenko, 40, and her family were living in Siversk, close to the front in Donetsk, when the



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full-scale war began. The air raid sirens were hardly effective, as often the bombing would begin either before or just after the sirens were activated.

"We didn't even have time to go to the basement [for cover]," says her son, Ilya, 11.

The shelling was incessant, and the family decided to leave for Lviv, where volunteers helped them find an apartment.

"When we left, I kissed the front doors and said I'd be back," says Mrs. Metsenko. "But those doors are no longer there. There is nowhere to return to."

Mrs. Metsenko later learned about the Caritas center, where she says they were greeted like family. She has noted positive changes in her son since he started attending the children's program. Where he was having difficulty speaking about his

feelings before, he is now more open and sociable. She believes the program will help him "not harbor some kind of trauma."

Children experience the trauma of war on multiple levels. In addition to being exposed to extreme violence, they also experience the grief of having lost parents and relatives, their home and belongings, their community ties and their friends.

Liza Vetoshko, 13, from Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast, misses the city, her friends and walking along the Sea of Azov in Mariupol, an hour's drive away. Volnovakha has been under Russian occupation since March 2022.

"I cried a lot last year. I was very sad because I didn't have any friends or anyone to talk to," she says. "After I started going to Caritas, I got a bright spot in my life. I have many more friends now. It just made me feel better."

At the foot of the Carpathian Mountains in western Ukraine, Kolomyia amazes with its beautiful architecture and the world's only museum dedicated exclusively to the pysanka, the traditional painted Easter egg. Painting pysanka is among the activities for children who attend Caritas Kolomyia.

During a workshop in mid-January, psychologist Uliana Romaniuk leads an art therapy session for children and parents. About 10 children who attend Caritas Kolomyia have lost at least one parent in the war.

Mrs. Romaniuk explains the activity to the 25 people present: Draw a one-story house, in which the roof represents their short-term goal or dream, the walls represent

Displaced children in the after school program at Caritas Lviv take shelter during an air raid siren on 13 January.





A psychologist with Caritas in Dnipro gives one-on-one counseling to a displaced child who suffers from panic attacks.

“AFTER I STARTED GOING TO CARITAS, I GOT A BRIGHT SPOT IN MY LIFE.”

the main tasks needed to achieve that goal, and the walk path represents the steps needed to complete each task in fulfilling the dream. On either side of the walk path, they are to draw barriers that could prevent them from achieving their goal.

Each family works on the drawing and then presents it to the group. Yaroslav Dvortsov, 11, explains that his walls represent reuniting with his family.

“I want to return to Kharkiv and everything to be as before,” he says, “so that I will be with my father.”

His father, a policeman, remained in Kharkiv. Yaroslav says the fence he drew as a barrier represents the war and overcoming the barrier is possible by supporting the Ukrainian army to bring about a victory.

Family after family names the war as a barrier, and peace as their dream. After the presentations, the psychologist sums up how one can find something positive, even during a war: There is a reassessment of values, an appreciation of what was not valued before, and an understanding of the importance of family.

For the next activity, the families are asked to use purple felt to make a Pomogaiko, an imaginary hero character in the form of a blot or a star, that is intended to help overcome crises or difficult circumstances. It can be stored in a box or under a pillow and taken out when needed, the psychologist suggests.

After the session, children blow bubbles as relaxing music plays — and a smile shines on each person’s face.

The view of Kamianske on the approach from the railway station opens onto a large metallurgical plant, heavy gray smoke billowing from its smokestacks. Pollution is a serious problem in this industrial city on the Dnipro River in eastern Ukraine, which has several metallurgical and

chemical plants and is in proximity to a storage facility for uranium production waste.

The third-largest city in Dnipropetrovsk region, Kamianske became a refuge for internally displaced people in 2014, when the conflict began in Donbas. At the time, Caritas Kamianske identified the isolation and trauma experienced by children displaced by the conflict and established a child-friendly space, which later became a center.

In 2022, the city became a haven again, but on a greater scale, welcoming 29,000 people who fled the war in Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv. Oksana Kolotylo, coordinator of Caritas Kamianske, recalls how depressed and scared the people were two years ago when they arrived. The children were afraid of unexpected noises — a passing tram could scare a child — and they had a hard time adapting to the new environment.

The children who exhibited the greatest trauma were those who fled Mariupol under Russian shelling. They would describe how planes dropped bombs continuously and speak about their relatives who were killed.

“It was like something out of a horror movie. When a child tells you this, it’s scary,” says Ms. Kolotylo. It took some children a year’s worth of visits to the center to start speaking about their experiences of the war, she adds.

In addition to age-specific play and art therapy, the center runs a theater program, which helps children process negative emotions and trauma through role play.

Maria Kuskova, 35, from Kharkiv, brings her 8-year-old son, Miron, to the theater group. A tram rumbles along the city rails outside while Miron in the stage area plays an evil character in the limelight of 11 girls.

While Miron is performing, Mrs. Kuskova socializes with other mothers who share her burdens.

“Creativity doesn’t help you forget about the war, but it helps you switch gears. You start to live,” says Mrs. Kuskova.

Adults and children react differently to stress, says Liliya Lytvinenko, a psychologist at Caritas Kamianske. In times of stress, a child’s breathing will slow down, as will the functional systems in the body, potentially affecting a child’s long-term physical health.

The impact of prolonged stress can also inhibit the creation of neurons in the brain, impairing cognitive function, learning and memory. She underlines the importance of monitoring the general health of children experiencing trauma to avoid stress-induced physical and mental illness, as well as developmental regression.

Mrs. Lytvinenko recalls helping a boy from Mariupol, who, at 4 years old, was not toilet trained due to the developmental regression brought on by the circumstances of the war. When the family arrived at Caritas Kamianske, she used games and play therapy for 45 days to help the boy transition out of diapers.

For most Ukrainian children, she points out, these two years of war were preceded by two years of isolation due to COVID-19 lockdowns and distance learning, creating a situation of successive traumas and developmental challenges. She emphasizes the importance for a child to feel that they are part of a community, “that we are not alone.”

“It is very important to be emotionally close,” she says, “to play, to make it clear that we are still alive, and everything is normal: You can develop, rejoice and play, and we can do it together.”

Kateryna Malofieieva is a journalist and TV producer based in Kyiv. She has been covering the conflict in Ukraine since 2014. Her work has been published by The Times of London, NPR and Al Jazeera.



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The Last Word

Perspectives from the president
by Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari



“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” (Lk 2:19)

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister. ... When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’

Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (Jn 19:25-27)

Each year, in the March edition of *ONE*, we mark the anniversary of the founding of CNEWA by Pope Pius XI on 11 March 1926. This year, we also mark the 75th anniversary of our work in the Middle East with the founding of Pontifical Mission by Pope Pius XII.

Given the current war in the Middle East, which erupted after the attack on the state of Israel on 7 October, we have never seen a greater importance to the presence of CNEWA-Pontifical Mission in that region. We lament the horror of the attack on 7 October, especially the loss of innocent Israeli life. We also lament the loss of innocent Palestinian life that has followed, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

I follow the developments on the ground throughout the region on a frequent basis. On my annual visit to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in December, I received reports about innocent people — both Palestinian and Israeli — killed on and since 7 October, and the impact this has had on their families. CNEWA-Pontifical Mission continues to reach out on behalf of the Palestinians through our Emergency Relief Fund for the Holy Land and our ongoing support of Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. We have also joined with ecumenical and interfaith groups in our fight against racism and antisemitism.

This year marks another significant anniversary — the 50th anniversary of our award-winning magazine. First published in 1974 as *Catholic Near East Magazine*, it was renamed *CNEWA World* in 2001, and then *ONE* in 2004. By way of celebration throughout the year, both



in print and online, the magazine will draw on some of the insights of our diverse authors over five decades. I thank Michael La Civita for his dedication to the magazine since 1989. I add my gratitude to Laura Ieraci, the current editor. *ONE* has been blessed with authors, photographers and an outstanding production staff over its years of existence, and I have noted previously the record-breaking 49 awards conferred to *ONE* at the Catholic Media Conference last June.

This March edition invites us to review the major locations and issues where CNEWA continues to work: the Holy Land, India, Eastern Europe, Northeast Africa and Iraq. These articles will accompany most readers on their Lenten journey toward our celebration of Easter. This holy season of Lent, or the Great Fast, as our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters refer to it, asks us to intensify our lives of prayer, to engage in the practice of fasting and to increase our almsgiving. These practices will enable us to enter more fully into the missionary fire and light of the Resurrection! They cannot be neglected.

At the beginning of my reflection, I quoted the texts that invite us to see our Christian lives through the eyes, heart and life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As I have written before, in every culture where CNEWA serves there exists a deep Marian sensitivity and imprint. She is everywhere.

The cover of the first issue of *ONE* magazine, published in December 1974, features the Bethlehem skyline with the Church of the Nativity and the Mosque of Omar. Opposite, an icon of Mary, pictured in 2019, is painted on the separation wall that runs through Bethlehem today.

I invite you then to enter the maternal disposition of the Theotokos, the God-bearer: of listening, learning and contemplating the mystery of God's plan for her life and for our lives. Only by cultivating a CNEWA culture of listening, learning and contemplating will we grow in our appreciation for the intimate relationship that must exist in our mission to serve, our call to action before God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lent and Easter challenge us to set out with a great sense of urgency and "haste" (Lk 1:39) as witnesses and missionaries to the crucified and risen Lord!

With my gratitude and prayers,

Peter D. Vaccari

Peter I. Vaccari
President

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