

# “A humanitarian disaster ...in slow motion”

National Director Caroline Hull reports back from Beirut, Lebanon (pictured below).

**“We are witnessing a humanitarian disaster in slow motion.” This is how Maronite Archbishop Hanna Rahmé of Baalbek – Deir El Ahmar describes the current situation for the Lebanese Christian community. Archbishop Rahmé told ACN that Lebanese Christians can’t afford enough food, underfunded schools are struggling to stay open and basic medical needs for children and the elderly are crippling expensive. Lebanon’s ancient Christian communities are crying out for our prayers and support.**

Once the Middle East’s only country with a Christian majority, Lebanon is now home to just over 2.5 million Christians, only about 35 percent of the total population — with more families leaving every day. But you can support ACN projects throughout Lebanon so that families aren’t forced to leave the land that they love. You can offer them hope for a brighter tomorrow.


For centuries Lebanon was a thriving country with a well-educated population

and a strong economy. Lebanon’s Christians helped build bridges of understanding between Muslim denominations, resulting in much less Islamic radicalism than we find in neighbouring countries like Syria and Iraq.

In recent years, corruption, political stagnation and economic collapse have created a perfect storm — culminating in the devastating explosion in Beirut’s port (4<sup>th</sup> August 2020). The blast severely damaged a crowded, mainly Christian neighbourhood; since then Beirut’s Christians, already marginalised, have struggled to afford even basic necessities. Similar problems affect Christians in other parts of the country as well.

**When I visited Lebanon earlier this year, I saw for myself the fruits of the Church’s vital work — with ACN projects helping children and the elderly, the sick and vulnerable and those in desperate need with nowhere else to turn — sustaining the Faith and shoring up a community under threat.** But more help is urgently needed.



**Archbishop Rahmé asks us to support Lebanon’s Christians. He said: “Let’s unite so no one sleeps hungry. Let’s restore their faith in humanity.”** 



# Small, but Mighty: Sister Patricia

Sister Patricia looks after Christian families in Bourj Hammoud, one of the poorest Christian neighbourhoods in Beirut. Most families here have little or no income. Many live in appalling conditions. Substance abuse is rife. Prostitution and domestic violence are on the rise.

Sister Patricia, a Sister of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and her community offer pastoral support to those most in need. They visit families, assess their needs and provide rent vouchers, fuel, food and medicines. They offer companionship to the elderly and support to parents and young people. Your generous love will allow Sister Patricia and her community to provide food parcels and other necessities to the most needy families in Bourj Hammoud. ✚



Credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN



Credit: Javier Linaza / ACN

**Meet Dimmi and her daughter, Princess.** Dimmi, her husband and their three children are among those families supported by Sister Patricia (pictured above). They have very little income and often there isn't enough money to buy milk for Princess.

Many families like Dimmi's came to Beirut to provide a better life for their children. They now live below the poverty line and can't even afford to return to their villages to seek support from family and friends. **Your mercy and compassion can give Lebanon's poorest Christian families the help they need to survive.** ✚

## Lebanon Today: Facts & Figures

- According to the World Bank, Lebanon's current inflation rates are the highest in the world, surpassing even those of Venezuela and Zimbabwe.
- The Lebanese pound has lost 90% of its value since 2019. Consumer goods prices have quadrupled in recent years.
- 70% of Lebanon's citizens now live below the poverty line; among refugees this rises to 90%.
- Christians once made up around two-thirds of Lebanon's population; now Christians account for only around 35%. Most Lebanese applying to emigrate are Christians.



Above: Lebanon in pictures – photo credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN



Credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN

## “Your Support is essential and indispensable.”

Sister Marie Makhlof, General Superior, Franciscan Sister of the Cross of Lebanon

**At Beirut's Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross, I was heartbroken to learn of the risk to these incredibly vulnerable people in the wake of haemorrhaging medical staff and lack of affordable medicines.**

On my visit to the children's ward, I was particularly moved by the loving way the staff treated a young boy unable to move without help. Each time a doctor or nurse passed, he received a kind word as they gently

rearranged the boy by moving his arms, standing him up or seating him on one of the chairs. Without their tender care, this young person would have been completely helpless.

And there were many smiles elsewhere in the hospital, too. We were treated to a fantastic vocal performance by a gentleman known for his rendition of hits by Elvis Presley. A talented resident painter had decorated the walls throughout the Mens' Ward with

amazing murals. The female residents joined us in prayer led by Fr Astolfo, travelling with us from ACN's office in Chile.

**You are helping to ease the plight of these struggling people, many of whom have been abandoned by families unable to care for them.**

The Franciscan Sisters of the Cross of Lebanon have asked ACN for prayers and support to provide three months' worth of vital medications for 1,650 patients. ✚

## Called to serve with joyful hearts



Sts. Peter and Paul Melkite Greek Catholic cathedral, Harissa, Lebanon



Credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN

**We shared a meal with the students at the Melkite Greek Catholic Seminary in Beirut. Despite many difficulties for Christians in Lebanon today, these committed young men radiated faith, joy and love of their Church and their homeland. We left feeling uplifted. Our Catholic faith in Lebanon has a secure future with dedicated young clergy in the making.**

To help cover tuition fees and basic living expenses, ACN has pledged just over £12,200 to St Anne's and St Paul's Major Seminary. Your support will ensure that no vocations will be turned away because of the current financial crisis. ✚



Above: Photo credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN



# ‘When the stomach is empty, children cannot think.’

Lebanese proverb



Credit: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN

**Can you imagine a school without paper, pens and textbooks? A school where teachers are few, children are hungry and electricity is available for only two hours per day? This is what ACN has found in schools all over Lebanon — schools that until fairly recently were delivering high quality education to happy, healthy children.**

Many non-Christian children attend Catholic schools in Lebanon, providing a unique platform for building respect, tolerance and trust among young people in a society often fractured along religious lines. Catechism for children is provided through schools rather than parishes, so schools play a crucial role passing on our Catholic Faith to the next generation.

Catholic schools across Lebanon are desperate for your help. Many are funded jointly by parents and the government; there is no free education in Lebanon. The collapse of the Lebanese economy has left many parents unable to pay school fees — or even in some instances to provide basic necessities like food and clothing for their children.

Teachers and staff are suffering too — some teachers are sleeping in classrooms because the cost of commuting to work each week now consumes most of their meagre salaries. Many teachers have left Lebanon or are planning to leave as they are generally highly qualified and hope to find teaching jobs elsewhere.

**With your support, ACN is working with the Church to help pupils and teachers in Catholic schools throughout Lebanon.** Teachers will receive food parcels and aid payments to help them get by. Children will receive hot meals, snacks at breaktime and school supplies. Catechists will receive small grants to help prepare children for the sacraments. Your kindness and mercy are even helping to power generators so that schools have electricity throughout the day which is literally life-changing for some Lebanese children. ✚

## Life rising from the Rubble

**The hardest part of our trip for me was meeting with the students in the Catholic Chaplaincy at St Joseph's University in Beirut. As the mother of three children in their 20s, I could easily imagine the difficulties that these young people were facing. They told us—some with tears streaming down their faces—that they felt they had no choice but to leave their families and country behind. Their faith is strong, but without access to jobs, healthcare or free education, these young people can't see a way to settle down and raise a family.**

But Fr Jad Chebly SJ offers help and hope through his project, Life Rising from the Rubble. Fr Jad leads the Chaplaincy Team at St Joseph's



A University Chaplaincy group meets during a power outage in Beirut.

University, home to around 12,000 students based in Beirut, Tripoli, Saida and Zahlé. Fr Jad and his team work to create a supportive, Catholic environment for students and staff alike by offering meetings and retreats throughout the year.

**The university is no longer able to fund Fr Jad's work, so ACN, with**

**your help, has stepped in to provide food, accommodation and transport to ensure that this vital outreach can continue. Your support could allow young people like these students to remain in Lebanon to work to create a more stable economy and a new political platform that allows them the voice they deserve.** ✚



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