NINEVEH PLAINS RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT:

“RETURN TO THE ROOTS”
with the help of Aid to the Church in Need

SUPPORTING THE RETURN OF IRAQI CHRISTIANS TO THE NINEVEH PLAINS
A COORDINATED ACTION AMONG THE MAIN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
As ISIS is being defeated, Christians wish to return to their liberated villages in the Nineveh Plains. However, without outside help:

- they will not be able to repair their houses and the village infrastructure;
- their right to return will be difficult to enforce in the shifting political constellations in the Nineveh Plains;
- their houses would be occupied by other groups or left empty, and the remaining Christians would have no choice but to emigrate;
- it is likely to mean the end of Christianity in Iraq.

Recognizing the universal human right to return of every displaced person, the three Christian churches in the Nineveh Plains (the Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Chaldean) with the help of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) have created the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC) in order to jointly:

- lobby and fundraise for the reconstruction of the Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains and the return of the Christians to these villages;
  Only the renovation of the private houses has been assessed at USD 250 million;
- plan and monitor the reconstruction and report on the use of the received funds;
- inform the public about the progress of the return of the Christians;
- invite all governments and charitable organizations to encourage the necessary political action from the international community to assure the Iraqi Christians their universal right to return.

ACN, committing its resources at the service of this cause, has already financed the renovation of the first 100 houses while continuing to feed and shelter the remaining 95,000 Christian IDP’s from the Nineveh Plains – those who wait for their chance to return home.
Currently there are still 12,000 registered Christian families (approximately 95,000 people) who fled the war in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains and are presently living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Erbil and neighboring towns. With the easing of the conflict and the liberation of their villages, many of these Christians seek to return to houses and livelihoods.

The destruction, however, is considerable: almost 13,000 homes in nine Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains were damaged, burnt or totally destroyed. All of them were plundered. These IDPs are slowly returning to visit, assessing the damage, and considering the possibilities of starting again.

Further challenges cloud this already complex situation: security concerns in the villages, Kurdish-Iraqi political maneuvering on the ground, infrastructure damage (water, electricity, roads, schools and clinics) and most importantly the transition period between the end of monthly apartment rental support and food packages - presently provided only by the churches - and the start of a new life in the Nineveh Plains.

Notwithstanding these, out of a concern for these IDPs and the future of Christianity in Iraq, the local churches (Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Chaldean) have united in the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC) and seek to rebuild these villages and help fulfill the desire of these families to return to their roots.

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) supports the NRC through communication, fundraising campaigns and advocacy with governments and major institutions.

“This is a historic moment for the future of Christianity in Iraq”
Fr. Andrzej Halemba
BACKGROUND

Following the invasion of Mosul by ISIS in the summer of 2014, Christians and other minorities fled with what they could carry seeking refuge first in Qaraqosh and then, when ISIS ran over that city one month later, streaming further to Erbil, Alqosh, Dohuk, Zakho, Sulaymaniyah, and other more secure towns.

These two waves of dispossessed Christians and minority groups brought the number of those under the direct care of the churches in these regions to approximately 150,000 within a matter of days.

After a few months, with many continuing their way to other cities and countries, the long-term number of families under the care of the Church stabilized at around 12,000 families or approximately 95,000 people dependent on aid for their lodging, food, education and healthcare.

In addition to the intense spiritual suffering and fear for their lives, many having lost several family members at the hands of ISIS, they confronted material squalor, as they barely escaped with the clothes they were wearing.

Coordinated by the Archdiocese of Erbil, almost 50% of all the funds spent to keep the remaining population of Christians in Iraq – approximately USD 35 million between 2014 and 2017 – was (and still is) provided by benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), a foundation of pontifical right, with the rest coming from a variety of other charitable agencies and donors.
THE PROJECT

The Nineveh Reconstruction Project aims at rebuilding the homes belonging to the internally displaced persons who fled their Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains.

With the liberation from ISIS in the Nineveh Plains and the relative stability achieved in some of the Christian villages, the Christian IDPs began planning to return and calling on the local church leaders to help them go home.

These church leaders (principally Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox) in turn looked to ACN - the foundation, which had helped the Christian IDPs to survive for over two years in Erbil and neighboring towns.

This was the start of an exceptional action, the so-called “Marshall Plan” which envisioned not only the reconstruction but the facilitation of employment through construction and the services related to it.

The first step was the necessity of engagement and expertise from the ground.

February 2017 witnessed the creation of the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC), a nine-person body made up of six members representing the three churches (Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox) and three expert members (communications, financial management and reporting, and internal coordination) supported by local architects, engineers and construction teams.

It is important to note that in the Nineveh Plains the voice and role of the local Church leaders is stronger than in other regions of Iraq. Indeed, the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholics, the Syrian Catholic Archbishop and the Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox are followed attentively not only by their faithful but also by civil authorities.
The establishment of the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC). Founding signatories are, from left to right:

H.E. Timotheus Moussa Al Shamany, Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch; H.E. Yohanna Petros Mouche, Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Mosul; Fr. Andrzej Halemba, Aid to the Church in Need Middle East section; H.E. Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Mosul, Kirkuk and Kurdistan and H.E. Mikha Pola Maqdassi, Chaldean Catholic Bishop of Alqosh.
In conjunction with the establishment of the NRC, ACN commissioned two surveys: a damage assessment as well as a population intent survey. The conclusions are indicated in the following maps:

**HOUSES DAMAGED, BURNED OR DESTROYED BY ISIS**

In the damage assessment survey engineering teams catalogued the level of destruction of almost 13,000 private homes – those that were burnt, destroyed or partially damaged by ISIS as well as the damage to schools, health clinics and religious buildings. These findings constitute a baseline survey, which serves as the foundation for the reconstruction costs.

**COST ESTIMATE FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF PRIVATE HOUSES**

The calculated cost estimate for reconstruction will be in excess of USD 250 million. The NRC will allocate the funds gathered according to the property damage as calculated by the assessment. The NRC will further coordinate with local architects, engineers and construction firms on the ground, monitor construction progress, assure project conclusion and provide reporting to the respective funding sources.

(A map and tables showing the number of houses damaged, burnt, partially damaged, and total for each region, followed by a breakdown of the cost estimate for reconstruction.)
Church Properties damaged (totally, partially or burnt):
Churches 34, Chapels 6, Convents (active) 15, Monasteries (contemplative) 3, Shrines 6, Presbyteries (rectories) 10, Bishop’s residences 2, Parish offices 9, Parish compounds 4, Seminaries 1, Catechetical centers 6, Pastoral centers 2, Cultural centers 4, Open recreation areas 3, Sport centers 4, Liturg. sewing vestment centers 1, Multipurpose halls 21, Lecture halls 3, Internet halls 3, Post-funeral reception halls 5, Wedding reception halls 4, Church rental locations (general) 79, Church rental locations (for shops) 89, Orchards 7, Cemeteries 10, Kindergartens (preschool) 13, Primary Schools 2, Nurseries 1, Orphanages 2, Clinics (dispensaries) 1, Libraries 9, Radio centers 1, Other 3.
TOTAL: 363
Concurrent to the damage assessment survey, ACN commissioned two population intent surveys of those Christian families who fled to Erbil from the affected regions: one in November 2016 and a second in February 2017. In the November 2016 survey only 3.28% of the respondents wanted to return to their native villages; at that time the security situation in the liberated region was fragile and combat operations were still ongoing. In a follow up survey in February 2017, 41% indicated that they wanted to return to their native villages and 46% said that they were considering it. ACN expects a further rise in intentions as IDP families in Erbil see progress being made in some villages where rebuilding has already started.
From the ‘Hopes and Dreams Collection’ a compilation of drawings made by IDP children of the Nineveh Plains
The Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC) is a united effort of the local churches (Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox) dedicated to the reconstruction of housing in the Nineveh Plains. For more information about the NRC please visit our website: www.nrciraq.org or contact Mr. Stephen Rasche (smrasche@gmail.com).

Aid to the Church in Need is a charity of pontifical right, which through its offices in 23 countries supports Christians wherever they are persecuted, oppressed or in material need through information, prayer and action. For more information visit our international website www.acninternational.org or contact Mr. Mark von Riedemann (publicaffairs@acn-intl.org) or your local ACN office.

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THE CAMPAIGN

To give a concrete sign of hope to the Iraqi Christians ACN is launching a fundraising campaign supporting the immediate reconstruction of houses as well as developing a near-future fundraising action in favor of the restoration and reconstruction of further houses, churches and church properties including convents and catechetical centers.

However, ACN can only cover a fraction of the reconstruction costs required. Therefore, we call upon all governments, church organizations and other charitable institutions to join us in the support of the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, and through it, the Christians in Iraq.
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