

Dominican Sisters Conference Announces Delegation to Iraq Plans for solidarity visit is contingent on outcome of Kurdish independence vote

Three U.S. Dominican women planning to visit their counterparts in Iraq are awaiting word from the sisters in Iraq to determine whether the outcome of the non-binding referendum on Kurdish independence held on Monday (today, yesterday) will impact the trip.

“They are scheduled to travel in mid-October and will go ahead as long as our sisters in Iraq deem it safe,” said Sister Marcelline Koch, OP, (Springfield) North American Co-promoter of Justice for the U.S. Dominicans. The delegates will spend about 10 days in the country, learning from the Iraqi Dominicans about their schools, ministries, and plans for supporting thousands of families displaced by ISIS in 2014 as they begin to return to their homes in villages on Nineveh Plain.

The bond between members of the Order of Preachers in the U.S. and Iraq began when Sister Margaret Galiardi, OP (Amityville) heard a report about the impact of draconian UN sanctions imposed on Iraq before the First Gulf War in 1990. “One of the sisters told [then-Master of the Order] Timothy Radcliff ‘Sanctions make us feel that we have been forgotten even by God,’” Sister Margaret recalled. It was Christmas, the time to celebrate the “the Word-made-flesh” in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Sister Margaret remembers coming to the realization “We have to go there in the flesh and by our presence say ‘God does not forget anyone.’”

In the intervening 18 years there have been four other official delegations, multiple visits by other individual members of the order to Iraq, and many longer-term residencies by Iraqi Dominican sisters in the United States. The Dominicans have also become conduits for financial support of the ministry of the Iraqi Dominicans which include pastoral work, orphanages, pre-schools, elementary schools, and health facilities.

“We’ve forged a unique bond with our Dominican family in Iraq that is rooted in our sense of complicity for the impact of decades of ineffective U.S. policy and devastating military action, the consequences of which were manifest in the ability of ISIS to decimate the country so thoroughly beginning in 2014,” said Sister Beth Murphy, OP, a member of the Iraq Coordinating Committee (ICC). “At the same time, we’ve learned a tremendous amount from our Iraqi sisters and brothers about trust in God, the courage to proclaim the gospel ‘whether convenient or inconvenient,’ and their ability to accompany persons whose lives have been up-ended by violence, political uncertainty, and terror,” she continued. The ICC is a committee of the North American Dominican Justice Promoters in partnership with the Dominican Sisters Conference (DSC). Caldwell

The delegates are Sister Catherine Waters, OP (, NJ.), Sister Rose Ann Schlitt, OP (Adrian, Mich.) and Gloria Escalona, a member of the St. Albert the Great Chapter of Dominican Laity in Oakland, Calif. Sister Catherine and Gloria were members of a previous delegation to Iraq in 2001. Sister Rose Ann lived with one of the members of the Iraq congregation during a period of ministry in Rome. Their biographies, and a timeline of the Iraq and US Dominicans’ relationship, follow.

News about the delegation can be followed at <http://www.facebook.com/WeHaveFamilyInIraq2017> and on the DSC website: <http://dominicansistersconference.org>.

The Dominican Justice Promoters represent the sisters, friars, and laity of the Dominican Family in the U.S. The DSC represents 6,000 Catholic sisters and their associates across the United States. Funds for the delegation have been contributed by Dominican Sisters, Friars, and Laity throughout the U.S.

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