

U.S. Dominican Women Travel to Iraq in Solidarity with Nineveh Plain Returnees

Three delegates to join Iraqi Dominican Sisters in Kurdistan and Nineveh Plain, November 14-25

“We have family in Iraq.” Dominicans throughout the United States have echoed this sentiment for many years, through much suffering of Iraqi civilians.

It has been four years since the Sisters of St. Catherine in Iraq, along with Christians and other religious minorities, had to flee for their lives from the Nineveh Plain as ISIS advanced. The Sisters returned to their hometown about a year ago to find it demolished. They have been facing the challenges of rebuilding.

This month three American Dominican women are visiting their counterparts in Iraq to learn firsthand about the rebuilding efforts. The delegation, organized by the Iraq Coordinating Committee of the North American Dominican Justice Promoters, in partnership with the Dominican Sisters Conference, is scheduled to leave November 14 and return November 25.

Those representing U.S. Dominicans on the trip are Adrian Dominican Sisters Rose Ann Schlitt, OP, and Nancy Jurecki, OP, and Gloria Escalona, a member of St. Albert the Great Chapter of Dominican Laity in Oakland, Calif.

While in Iraq, the women will visit with Iraqi Dominican Sisters to learn about the status of their schools and other ministries, and plans for supporting thousands of families displaced by ISIS in 2014.



“My hopes center upon our Sisters who have undergone immense trials and humiliations as they were violently uprooted from their homes, towns, and ministries by ISIS,” Sister Rose Ann said. “They lived as internally displaced persons in the Kurdistan region of the north for four years. Now, some have been able to return and literally try to pick up the pieces of their lives, convents, and ministries. They currently struggle at many different levels in their daily lives. ... Although I am unable to fully understand the depth of their suffering and loss, I will try to be fully and lovingly present to them and to express our solidarity with them in their present and future challenges.” she said.

Sister Nancy, Chief Mission Officer for Providence St. Joseph Health in Southern California, volunteered to be part of the delegation because of her deep, personal connections to the people of Iraq. She was influenced by a parishioner’s faithful intercessions for the well-being of the Iraqi people during the 1991 Gulf War, by her nephew’s service during the US incursion that began in 2003, and by her personal relationship with a sister from the congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, Iraq, with whom she lived.



Sister Nancy suspects she can’t fully comprehend the depths of the suffering of the Iraqi people, but she hopes to listen to their stories and be present to them. “Now, as much as ever, I desire to hear the stories and share the pain of remnant Christian families who are replanting their lives in the land where the Bible began,” she said. “In a sense, I will be fulfilling a desire and bearing witness to a unity that guns cannot destroy.”

Gloria Escalona, DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice), is semi-retired and volunteers as a health care provider in homeless shelters, hospitals, and nursing homes around the San Francisco Bay area. She looks forward to returning to Iraq after her first trip with Voices for Veritas III in 2001. That Dominican delegation travelled in opposition to the UN economic sanctions that were decimating Iraq's infrastructure, eroding civil society, and taking the lives of Iraqi children. "That trip was life changing," she shared. "While traveling around the country was relatively safe, I could sense an impending conflict and more suffering for the people and wondered what I could do." On that trip, she connected with the Dominican laity, a large and active group who taught catechism to Christian children and led Bible study groups in the neighborhoods. She is anxious to see who is still around and what they are doing. Gloria has several speaking engagements planned when she returns, at which she will share her photos and reflections.



The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill support this important trip in which Dominicans from the United States show solidarity with their Iraqi Dominicans sisters and brothers' mission and ministry.

Sisters from many of the 19 U.S. Dominican congregations have also written letters of support that were translated into Arabic and will be carried to Iraq by the delegates.

Follow the delegation's trip on Facebook ([WeHaveFamilyInIraq2018](#)) and on the Dominican Sisters Conference website, [dominicansistersconference.org](#).

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