

Diocese of Manchester

The Catholic Church in New Hampshire

Understanding the Crisis in the Middle East

Today we are dismayed to see how in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus . . . in this third world war, waged peacemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide – I insist on the word – is taking place, and it must end. ~ Pope Francis, Address at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, July 9, 2015.

BACKGROUND

Christians have lived in the Middle East for thousands of years and are one of the region's oldest religious groups. But in recent years, Christians, along with other religious minorities, have been brutally targeted by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and face the option to convert, pay an exorbitant tax, or death. Christians have been the subjects of brutal torture, mass murders, beheadings, and crucifixions. Women and children routinely are enslaved, raped, and given as "rewards" to ISIS fighters, and Christian women are denied access to medical care.

In 2003, there were 2 million Christians in Iraq; today, there are fewer than 200,000. Syria's Christian population has seen an equal reduction in its numbers.

As a result of religious persecution, insecurity, violence, and exclusionary policies, millions have become refugees of their homes in the Middle East. 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced within their own country and over 4 million are refugees in other countries. The refugees include significant numbers of women and children fleeing violence from the civil war in Syria as well as the rise of ISIS.

Pope Francis has denounced the persecution, torture, and killing of Christians in the Middle East as "a form of genocide" that must end.

WHY SHOULD EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD MATTER TO CATHOLICS?

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. This is what is described as solidarity, and Saint John Paul II summarized that it

is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. (Sollicitudo rei Socialis, no. 38)

Jesus taught us one of the greatest commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk 12:31). Loving our neighbor has global dimensions, and this commandment calls us to understanding and action both at home and abroad. Solidarity also includes the call of the Gospel to welcome the stranger among us (Mt 25:31-46), including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families.



As Catholics, we are gathered in a special way with our brothers and sisters around the world. When we receive the Eucharist, we are united in Christ, and by means of communion with Christ, we are united among ourselves as members of one another. We are members of the body of Christ, no longer each alone but now part of each other. As Pope Benedict (then Cardinal Ratzinger) said,

For this reason, in my prayer at communion, I must look totally toward Christ, allowing myself to be transformed by him, even to be burned by his enveloping fire. But precisely for this reason, I must always keep clearly in mind that in this way he unites me organically with every other person receiving him – with the one next to me, whom I may not like very much, but also with those who are far away, in Asia, Africa, America or in any other place. ~ Cardinal Ratzinger, Lecture at the Bishops' Conference of the Region of Campania, June 2, 2002.

This unity is not limited to the moment of communion but only begins here.

HOW CAN I TAKE ACTION?

We invite you to:

PRAY for peace in the Middle East and for those displaced by violence.

STAY INFORMED

ACT – We are given a unique opportunity in New Hampshire to communicate directly with state and federal elected officials and candidates for office. One way you can make a difference is to ask legislators and candidates where they stand on the crisis in the Middle East and to research their positions. You may find these sample questions to be helpful:

- Are you willing to acknowledge that the crimes ISIS is perpetrating against Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities in the Middle East is genocide? If not, what more would ISIS need to do in order for you to be willing to consider it genocide?
- Each year, 100,000 Christians have been killed worldwide because of their faith, and I am particularly concerned about the crisis in the Middle East. What will you do to stop religious persecution?
- In the last decade, an estimated 90% of Christians in Iraq and Syria have fled the Middle East. Do you believe the future of the Middle East must include Christians? If so, what will you do to support their safety and continued presence?

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

For additional information, including prayer resources, visit catholicnh.org/immigration

Subscribe to Catholics Confront Global Poverty advocacy action alerts at confrontglobalpoverty.org, an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services.

