



NEWS

Visit to LIBANO and SYRIA – August 2022

Sr. Monica Joseph RJM, Superior General, accompanied by Sr. M^a Carmen Muñoz RJM, General Councilor liaison with the Delegation of England/Lebanon and Syria, visited Lebanon and Syria from August 12 to 27, 2022. Sr. Shanty George, general councilor responsible for formation, went to Lebanon for a few days, at the beginning of the visit, to meet the novice and her Formation Mistress.



Lebanon and Syria are two countries in the Middle East, which are part of the Delegation of England/Lebanon/Syria. The Visit to England took place from the end of August to September 10, 2023.

Jesus-Mary in the Middle East.

The Religious of JM began the mission in Lebanon in 1963 and in Syria in 1983.

We currently have two communities:

One in Damascus (Syria) with 4 Syrian Sisters. On March 9, 2023, the novice Maya Joseph Alhelou made her temporary profession. She has been sent to Pakistan for a juniorate time in this Province.

Another community is in Rabweh (Lebanon). This year two young sisters from Pakistan have joined the community to collaborate in the school's apostolic mission and one is also studying.



SYRIA

The post-war reality in Syria is being strongly experienced. The fighting has stopped in the areas where the sisters live and work, but a sense of uncertainty and anguish remains. Eleven years of conflict and sanctions have had a devastating effect on the Syrian economy, setting the country back at least 25

years. Most of the basic services that the family depended on (health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, electricity and social protection) are absent. Now families are struggling to put food on the table.

Many Syrian families have lost the head of the family in the war, so the burden falls solely on the women. A study by the United Nations Population Fund showed that in around 145,000 Syrian families, women are now the heads of the family and solely responsible for supporting the family. Therefore, women have been forced to work to meet the necessities of life, are more vulnerable and are in danger of being exploited in a patriarchal society. Gender-based violence against women was and remains significant in Syria, including domestic violence, in addition to low wages and lack of adequate employment opportunities. Despite everything, the Syrian woman does not lose her courage, her strength, or her hope for a better future.

There is also damage in Syrian society itself because Christians, because of the discrimination they suffer, are fleeing the country in large numbers. Now, after two thousand years of Christian history and the presence of many rites both Orthodox and Catholic, Christianity is in great decline. The absence of Christianity or the forced departure of its people is a wound for the Middle East.

The mission.

The mission in Syria has been evolving, adapting to the specific situation of the moment. They have sought new apostolic fields and new ways to respond to the immediate needs of the people in the post-war period and to help the Christian population so that they can make their desire to stay in their land come true.

They collaborate in Youth Ministry, CVX and Catechism for children and young people in different cities: Damascus, Ma'arouni , Ma'aloula , Homs , Aleppo.

- They direct and are responsible for the Damascus University Girls' Residence, which belongs to the Greek-Catholic Patriarchate, with 47 students.
- Dina Bélanger Centre for Music and Art: with around 100 music students and 50 art students. Along with learning music and art, it is an opportunity for therapy and healing for these children and young people.
- Training of young people with the aim of preparing them to be leaders at the service of society and the church. Different courses are taught to equip them with professional skills and also for the empowerment of women. They are offered areas for study with computerized facilities, silence, peace. Many homes are still in very poor condition. All services are free, help is received from several Aid organizations.
- Micro projects for families and young people to provide financing to people so they can start their own small businesses.
- Collaboration in the "Hope Centres" for the promotion of young people
- JM factories of jeans, sweaters and clothing, in order to give work to people.
- Some Christian families and children are offered support by providing financial assistance for food, medicine, partial payment of rent and construction of houses destroyed by war.
- Many of the projects are financed by external agencies and also with the collaboration of England and some JM Provinces.

In all these tasks they work on a shared mission. We only have four Sisters in Syria at this time, but there are many lay people who share in the mission and who are experts in these various fields of mission.

LEBANON

The current reality that Lebanese families and institutions are experiencing is very distressing. Lebanon is in a major economic and political crisis. Unfortunately, the economic crisis has had very serious repercussions and this affects the identity and demographics of Lebanon. Currently the country is facing many problems, some of which are a total financial collapse in all sectors: banking - customer deposits are not able to be withdrawn; collapse of the army; the public and private sectors are demanding payments at black market prices or are reducing salaries or staff; the tourism sector hardly has any clientele; private educational institutions have increased fees to cover the cost of diesel for heating; the medical sector suffers from a shortage of medical supplies; the unemployment rate is high due to the scarcity of job opportunities; There is an endless queue to get flour, medicine and fuel. Adding to the current problems is the additional burden of meeting the needs of displaced Syrians and Palestinian refugees caused by the wars in their countries.

There is little state presence in terms of development plans and future projects.

Lebanon has always been distinguished by its culture, civilisation and solid social structure, which has resisted internal and external wars. The people long for a change in the country that will help it progress economically and politically and restore its religious harmony and ecumenical spirit.

The mission

The sisters live in an apartment in our former convent building next to the large school that Jesus and Mary built and which was transferred to the Diocese in 2002. The sisters are in contact with the school and collaborate in it.

This year two religious from Pakistan work at the school, the presence of Jesus and Mary having increased there.

They participate in a poor suburb of Bourj Hammoud in supporting people in need, carrying out good social and pastoral work.

AFJM in the Middle East:

There are AFJM groups in Lebanon and Syria.

There are currently two AFJM groups in Syria with 30 women in one and 25 young people in the other. In Lebanon there is a group with 10 members.

We met with the groups in Beirut and Damascus.

Ecumenism is lived in these countries and is a great wealth. During the days of our visit we participated in Eucharists celebrated in different rites.

Some photos of what we have experienced:



We ask God's blessing on Lebanon and Syria, for the mission there and for all who live and work there.

Praised for ever be Jesus and Mary