

Hands-on reconciliation

“Reconciliation works best if people from all religious and ethnic backgrounds collaborate in social projects”, Fr. Jens Petzold believes. On 29 February 2020, he briefed confessional Utrecht about the activities fostering reconciliation and reconstruction in the diocese of bishop Mirkis in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah in Irak. Catholic Utrecht has been supporting this work since 2016. Then, the bishop hosted 700 Muslim, Yezidi and Christian refugee students, who had fled Mosul occupied by ISIS.

Fr. Petzold is one of eight members of the mixed congregation led by the missing Fr. Paolo Dall’Oglio. Since 1991, they have been running the convent Mar Musa in Syria, a centre for prayer, labour and hospitality in the light of God’s love for Islam. In 2010, the then bishop Louis Sako invited the congregation to also open a house in Sulaymaniyah. Until recently, they were mainly busy with hosting 250 refugees and displaced persons in that house. Currently only a few families remain. “There is no freedom in morals”, Fr. Petzold explains, “If you can help, you must”. Currently, life is gradually reverting back to normal, and they start focusing on their core mission of meeting centre. The school, where refugees followed language classes, is being converted into a community college. In addition, they are establishing a library of 20,000 titles. So far, they received a small subsidy to lay the foundation. The Dominicans have offered assistance with the catalogue.

In the meantime, bishop Mirkis is building a home for Alzheimer patients, again in collaboration with all religious and ethnic groups in the community. The home will cater for 70% paying and 30% non-paying patients of all denominations. Both the Alzheimer home and the community college rely heavily on additional funding. Sr. Yosé Höhne-Sparborth is in charge of fundraising in the Netherlands. Send us your suggestions at secretariaat@katholiekutrecht.nl or donate at account number NL15 ASNB 0904 9553 11 of Vereniging Kerk en Vrede, Utrecht.

Our relationship with Irak calls for reflection. In that Middle-Eastern country, Abrahamitic hospitality remains the norm, inspiring people to welcome millions of refugees. How do we react to the moral call of the people camping on the borders of Europe?

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View this video on the construction of the Alzheimer home: <https://youtu.be/PsHCTYu3K8c>