

# The desecrated grave of Fr Ganni



Fr Ragheed Ganni

When Daesh seized the town of Caramles on the Nineveh Plains they not only desecrated the church but also defiled the grave of martyr priest Ragheed Ganni.

Fr Ganni was killed in 2007 when leaving his church in Mosul after Sunday Mass.

One of the armed men who stopped him screamed: “I told you to close the church. Why didn’t you do it? Why are you still here?” Fr Ganni replied: “How can I close the house of God?”

His attackers shot him dead along with the three sub-deacons with him. Their deaths show that the problems for Iraq’s Christians did not begin in summer 2014 – and it is unlikely that they will end after Daesh is finally driven out. **Please pray that these ancient Christian communities will finally be able to live in peace in Iraq.** ☩



Fr Thabet Habeb Mansur wept to see what extremists did to Fr Ragheed Ganni’s grave.

# Forced to deny Christ



Image: Aid to the Church in Need/Jaco Klamer

Ismail escaped Daesh-occupied Mosul with his mother Jandark after surviving life under the extremist regime for over two years.

**Tales of torture and forced conversion to Islam have been revealed by Christians who escaped from Daesh (ISIS).**

55-year-old widow Jandark Nassi and her 16-year old son Ismail told Aid to the Church in Need about their terrifying experiences at the hands of the extremists after Daesh seized Baretella on the Nineveh Plains.

Jandark said: “My son was forced by Daesh to practise Islam and I was tortured for not knowing anything about Islam and the Qur’an.”

“I am embarrassed for having had to profess Islam,” Ismail admitted. But initially he stood firm, refusing to renounce his faith – even being thrown in jail for not converting. But his horrific ordeal behind bars made him fear for his life and that of his mother.

Describing his time in prison he said: “One day a Shi’a [Muslim] was shot right in front of me. The terrorists told me: ‘If you do not convert to Islam, we will shoot you as well’. That is when I ‘converted’ to Islam. From that time on, we concealed that we were Christians.”

Now to all appearances living as Muslims, they were taken to Mosul, where they saw numerous horrors

including seeing gun-wielding Jihadi children execute a group of prisoners.

Despite having outwardly converted to save his life, Ismail and his mother secretly clung to their faith, but “Then the Daesh warriors found my necklace with a cross, a sign that I am a Christian. The Jihadists beat me and I had to study the Qur’an for a month. I was hit whenever I could not answer their questions the way they wanted me to.” His widowed mother was also jabbed with long needles for failing to give the correct answers when questioned about the Muslim religion.

But during the battle for Mosul their chance came. They had to take shelter in a ruined house after Daesh snipers saw them fleeing and tried to kill them. But after several hours Iraqi soldiers seized the area. Jandark and Ismail cautiously left the house waving a white flag – and were welcomed by the liberating army.

**They are now being looked after in Erbil by our Iraqi Church partners who, thanks to your generosity, are continuing to provide essential aid for Christians whose lives have been touched by the malice of Daesh.** ☩



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Report by John Newton (Interviews in Iraq by Jako Klamer)



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# Hope on the Horizon: Can Iraq’s Christians go home?



An Iraqi Christian holding the head of a statue of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which was decapitated by Daesh (ISIS) in Mar Addai Church, Caramles on the Nineveh Plains.

**“So much has been destroyed by Daesh (ISIS). At least 50 percent of the homes on the Nineveh Plains have suffered destruction from these extremists – there are still hidden explosives in the villages,” Aid to the Church in Need’s Middle East expert Fr Andrzej Halemba reported.**

Iraq’s Nineveh Plains have been desolate since Daesh seized them in summer 2014, causing those living there to flee – most Christians sought sanctuary in the Kurdish capital Erbil where they have been cared for by the Church. Shortly after Daesh was driven out at the end of 2016 Fr Andrzej surveyed the villages, working with local Church personnel to assess whether Christians would be able to return. But their findings were not promising.

Buildings that had been left untouched during the fighting were torched by Daesh as they retreated, and homes were booby-trapped – the depraved Islamist extremists even left explosive devices hidden among children’s toys.

But a handful of brave Christians ventured back to their towns and villages to find out what state they are in. The Mayor of Qaraqosh – which was Iraq’s last Christian

majority town before it fell – led a group back there. They not only found many buildings torched or in ruins, but also discovered Daesh was still there hiding in subterranean tunnels under the town. Kurdish Peshmerga Brigadier General Mahram Yasin said: “We want people to be patient and not to return here until we completely clear the area, as we want to ensure their safety”.

Aid to the Church in Need is working with the local Church to draw up a plan to rebuild some of the towns and villages that were destroyed – but realistically no one will be able to go back for two or three years’. Explosives will have to be cleared first and then homes need to be rebuilt.

The conflict in the Nineveh Plains may be drawing to an end, but for the displaced families the fight for survival is not over. Fr Andrzej said: “We have to help these refugees get through each day. This means continuing our support with food baskets for over 12,000 families as well as for housing.”

Many families are still dependent upon the Church for food, lodging, clothes, medicine and other essentials including spiritual support. Please continue to help them. ☩

**Helping the suffering Church today**  
[www.aidtochurch.org](http://www.aidtochurch.org)



## Feeding the families that fled



Food being distributed to families Daesh drove out of their homes on the Nineveh Plains.

**When Christians driven out of the Nineveh Plains arrived in Erbil in summer 2014, most of those who sought sanctuary there came with practically nothing.**

The Chaldean Church – an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with Rome – knew that it had to find food for the starving thousands who had fled for their lives as Daesh (ISIS) declared an Islamic caliphate in north-west Iraq.

ACN staff were visiting Erbil at the time the displaced families started to arrive and Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil turned to the charity, urgently seeking help. **Since then ACN has supported the cost of monthly food parcels containing:**

- Rice
- Dried beans
- Noodles
- Oil
- Milk powder
- Tomato purée
- Sugar
- Fresh vegetables
- Canned fish
- Other tinned foods such as chicken and mushrooms

**Thanks to your help ACN can continue the vital work of helping to feed Iraq's displaced Christian families more than two years on.** ✚

## Can Christians return to Qaraqosh?



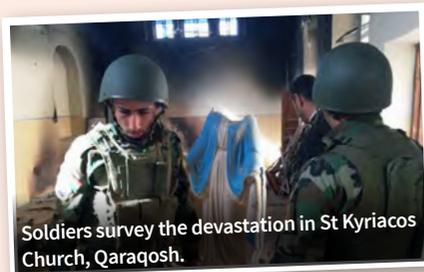
Setting up for Mass in one of Qaraqosh's ruined churches.

**“The Daesh (ISIS) terrorists have destroyed a lot of my possessions, but I am still quite well off, considering the damage that I can see in my neighbours' houses – many houses have been burned or even completely destroyed. I have been blessed.”**

This was the assessment of householder Louis Petrus who fled Qaraqosh in August 2014 when the Christian town fell to Daesh.

Despite most of his belongings having been stolen or destroyed, he was optimistic when he returned there shortly after its liberation from the extremists.

Churches did not escape devastation. St



Soldiers survey the devastation in St Kyriacos Church, Qaraqosh.

George's Church became a Daesh bomb factory – and mannequins were taken from local shops and set up to form a shooting range in the Church of the Immaculate Conception. But that did not stop Christians celebrating Mass in the bullet-scarred Church when they went back.

The town is still not free from Daesh. Militants are hiding below the town in subterranean passageways. There are sightings but Daesh fighters usually disappear before security services can arrest them.

72-year-old Fr Sharbil Eeso told us, “Last week, a jihadist emerged from the tunnel system which Daesh has built underneath the city. The red brigade of the army immediately shot and killed him.” Sadly he revealed that the Daesh fighter was probably no more than thirteen years old.

Talking about the devastation Fr Sharbil said: “Despite all the damage, I have hope for the future. If our security is guaranteed, Christians can continue to live in Iraq. I want to return to Qaraqosh when there is electricity

and water again.”

Aid to the Church in Need is working with the local Church, drawing up plans to help the Christians driven from the Nineveh Plains to return, but until they can go home the charity is committed to continuing to provide essential aid for the displaced who fled Qaraqosh and other settlements on the Nineveh Plains.

Louis Petrus also hopes to return one day: “This is my country. As soon as it is safe in the city... I want to rebuild my life in Qaraqosh. This is my place, I shall remain here until I die.” ✚



Many of the buildings in Qaraqosh, which was the last Christian majority city in Iraq, have been destroyed.

## Still helping them survive

**There are still around 12,000 families who fled the Nineveh Plains and are being cared for by the Church in Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region.**

ACN is working with our local Church partners to provide:

- 11,800 monthly food parcels
- Housing for 2,414 families
- Help with rent for 4,816 families

Food and other essentials are being provided on an ongoing basis. Displaced families have now, as far as possible, been moved from portable cabins into rented accommodation to give them back a sense of dignity and normality. Those who have managed to find part-time work are able to cover some of their rent – but still need help. **The vast majority of families being helped are Christians – both Catholic and Orthodox – but where other minorities, including Yazidis, have turned to the Church for help they have not been turned away.** ✚



Aid to the Church in Need is working through local Church partners to provide vital aid for internal refugees in Erbil.