



OPFAM

Dominican Family Matters: 27.02.2018

*Contemplate the Gospel of Humanity
then preach the Humanity of the Gospel*

A Newsletter for the Dominican Family in Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

Dominican sisters help educate Iraqi children returning home



When Iraqi residents fled their homes during the Islamic State invasion, they left behind their houses, neighbors, and day-to-day lives. For the children who fled, leaving their home behind also meant an interruption in their education – in some cases for months or years.

While some refugee camps offer classes for children, challenges abound and students often fall behind.

Now, a group of Dominican sisters in one Iraqi town is working to help educate displaced children as their families return to their homes and work to rebuild their lives.

With the support of Catholic charity *Aid to the Church in Need* in Spain, the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Sienna were able to restore their convent, which had been destroyed by the Islamic State in Iraq. Today, they offer classes to hundreds of children who had been displaced by the war.

“We try to help the children, giving them peace: in our convent we offer them a safe place,” Sister Ilham told ACN in late

December. Despite the expulsion of ISIS, security in the area remains unstable.

In May 2017, ACN funded the restoration of Our Lady of the Rosary Convent with a grant of \$54,000. Located in Teleskuf, north of the plain of Nineveh, the convent is just over 20 miles outside of Mosul.

The sisters worked 12-hour days to prepare the convent to welcome the children, Sister Ilham said.

They provide daycare for children between three and five years old. In the mornings, they teach about 150 children between the ages of six and 12. In the evenings, they teach students 12 years of age and older.

Sister Ilham, 57, was working for a church in Mosul when the rapid advance of the Islamic State forced her and her community to flee. However, after the fall of the terrorist group, she returned to the area and today is helping those displaced from Teleskuf.

“None of us wanted to leave where we come from, but as the attacks continued, we had to flee to save our lives,” she said.

"In 2016 some 6,000 people had to leave Telskuf. When I returned to this area, all the houses were abandoned and many of them destroyed," she continued. "In Teleskuf all that is left of many of buildings are the ruins. The school and the children's home are destroyed, the doors of the convent were forced open and the sisters' home was sacked."

In addition to teaching at the convent, the sisters visit the members of the Christian community in their homes, teach catechism to the children, and prepare them for their First Communion.

Once the local school is rebuilt, the children will no longer need to attend the convent

CSW 62: Empowering Rural Women and Girls

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an exclusive **UN body** dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The CSW is an essential instrument that brings together UN member states, UN entities, and civil society organizations on behalf of fostering and creating new norms about the treatment of women and girls everywhere. Each year the Commission meets for two-weeks in March. This year the Commission will be in session 12th to 23rd of March to discuss the priority theme of "*Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.*"

Earlier this month, the official CSW62 *Zero Draft agreed conclusions* document was released. The document acknowledges the fact that rural women and girls are the most vulnerable group in society in terms of social, economic, and political injustices. The draft highlights key areas to be addressed such as access to basic rights such as education, health services, economic assistance, and legal aid. The document also highlighted the importance of investing in rural women's agricultural businesses, of taking measures to protect rural women and girls from climate-induced disasters, and the need to include the participation of rural women in the political processes that impact their lives. The draft

classes. In the meantime, the sisters hope they can help the children from falling too far behind in their studies.

"Before the Islamic State invasion, there were five sisters in the convent, while now there are only two of us. Fortunately, we are will soon receive reinforcements," Sister Ilham said.

In addition to helping fund the convent reconstruction, Aid to the Church in Need is currently helping rebuild 13,000 houses and more than 300 church properties destroyed by the Islamic State in Iraq.

went further and called upon UN Member States, the private sector, civil society groups, and other international institutions to implement and uphold rural development policies. National measurements should also be applied to new policies and programs as these measurements translate into statistics that can be referenced to gain a better idea on how we can all improve the standard of living for rural women and girls.

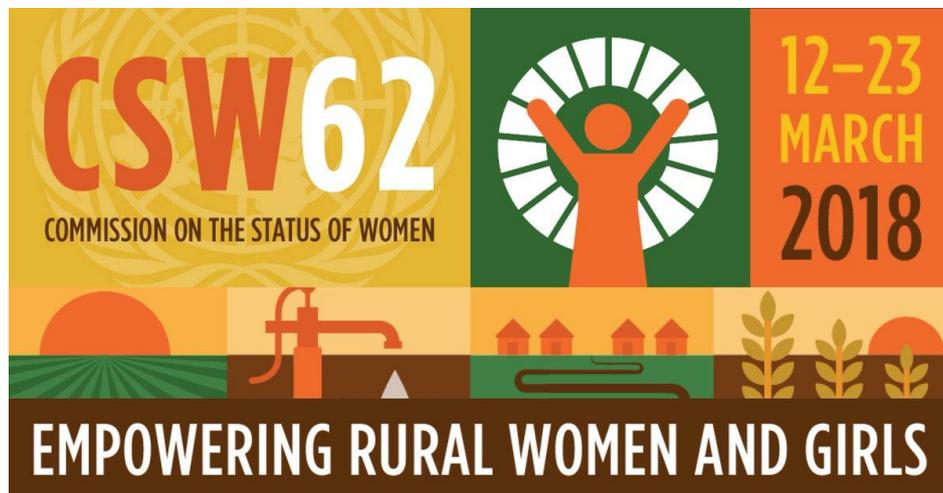
In response to the draft, the civil society led *NGO Committee on the Status of Women* issued a *Zero Draft Document Recommendations* that brought up crucial points not addressed in the agreed conclusions. These points included an emphasis on protecting female migrants; implementing safe public transit in rural and urban cities; putting an end to child marriage; educating boys and men about the dangers of gender stereotypes; investing in rural clinics and preventative care programs; and providing access to technologies needed for an ever interconnected society.

The *Recommendations* document brought up two very important points instrumental to this year's Commission. The first point made was the role media outlets play in shaping stereotypes surrounding rural women and girls. The media has the power and capacity to create positive narratives in communities and broader society. These outlets can be used as a platform to voice and document the lives of rural women and girls and can be used to

inspire new societal norms. The second important point involved health services that specifically called for investment in frameworks that increase provider density by working with rural communities to recruit, train and retain medical professionals in these areas. There is no need to reinvent the wheel; health programs already exist on the ground. What needs to be done is to offer these professionals the support they need in order to meet the demands of the community. This recommendation made it a point to mention the importance to *“Integrate local and indigenous knowledge and practices into health infrastructure.”* If and when medical

aid is provided to rural communities, outsiders cannot approach these communities with a western medical point of view. It is essential to recognize and respect the cultural and religious of beliefs of these peoples. Civil society groups once again offer crucial gender perspectives to UN activities. These groups make it a point to hold UN entities accountable for the implementation of fair policies and for providing remedies to cultural insensitivities. As the CSW draws nearer the DLC looks forward to the stimulating dialogues surrounding rural women and girls in the efforts to leave no one behind.

By Viviana Garcia-Blanco, Dominican Volunteer



Dominican Sisters International, Asia-Pacific Region, will be represented at this conference to be held at UN Headquarters New York, by Sisters Patricia Madigan OP and Tabiria Tabeau OP from Australia and the Solomon Islands, respectively. They will join with other

Dominican groups and Sister Margaret Mayce OP, NGO representative of the Dominican Leadership Conference at the United Nations.

Fr Javier Abanto Silva is the New Promoter for Communications



The Master of the Order, fr Bruno Cadoré has appointed fr Javier Abanto Silva as the New General

Promoter for Communications in the Order. Fr Javier is a son of the Province of St John the Baptist in Peru and he succeeds fr Eric Salobir who has concluded his tenure.

Fr Javier was born at Cajamarca, north of Peru in 1974. He made his first profession in the Order in 1996 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2011. He studied Philosophy and Theology in Peru. He has a Masters in

Pastoral Theology and a Licentiate in the Theology of the Media from Colombia.

He has worked with the Radio Santo Domingo in Chimbote and for the past six years, he has been working with Radio Santa Rosa de Lima as its Director. He has also been the Media Promoter for his home province. In recognition of this passion for communications, the National Association of Journalists of Peru inducted him as an honorary member.

Communication has been an integral part of the life of fr Javier. The task of his new office will be the promotion of the life and mission of the Order through very possible means of communication. According to him, "The technologically advanced "new world" is a great pulpit for a Dominican from which he can preach the mercy, the hope and the truth of Jesus Christ, the great communicator"