



**E-BULLETIN #270**

**14-May-17**

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 499

### **Fr Ragheed Aziz Ganni – Iraqi martyr**

During my recent Visitation to Switzerland I met with all the members of the Pallottine family on 20 Apr 2017. During our dialogue I mentioned, as always, 3 points essential for the proper development of the UAC worldwide:

- a profound Pallottine spirituality
- an intensive formation programme for its members, modelled after the Cenacle
- concrete missionary outreach initiatives aimed at helping the most vulnerable people everywhere in the world

The whole UAC in Switzerland also expressed a desire to engage in missionary activities in favour of helping the needy, following the example of Poland, Australia and India. Upon return to Rome, I contacted the priest from Iraq, Fr Rebwar Audish Basa Basa. The following story and suggested initiative are the fruit of our conversation.

**Ragheed Aziz Ganni**, born in 1972, became a Chaldean Catholic priest. On 03 Jun 2007 [Trinity Sunday] he was killed, along with three subdeacons [including his cousin] – **Basman Yousef Daud**, **Wahid Hanna Isho**, and **Gassan Isam Bidawed** – in front of Mosul's *Holy Spirit* Chaldean Church where he was parish priest.

Fr Ragheed had just finished celebrating the Sunday evening Divine Liturgy. The three deacons had recently decided to accompany him because of threats against his life. After Mass, as he was walking away from the church with all three of them and with Isho's wife following in their car, the group was stopped by unknown armed men. One of the gunmen shouted at Fr Ragheed that he had warned him to close the church and demanded to know why he didn't do it. Fr Ragheed replied asking "How can I close the house of God?"

The gunmen ordered the woman to flee. They then demanded that the four men convert to Islam. As they refused they were shot down. The car



Once again the Catholic Chaldean Church of the Holy Spirit is the target. This morning a group of men fired rockets against the building, whilst an explosive devise was detonated outside a usually unused entrance door.

was then set with explosives to deter any interference, so that the bodies would remain abandoned. Several hours passed until a police bomb-squad defused the devices allowing the corpses to be recovered.



Thousands of people attended the funeral of the four men in Karemlash, Iraq on 04 Jun 2007. At the time Ragheed was Secretary to Paulos Faraj Rahho, the Archbishop of the Chaldean Church of Mosul, Iraq's largest Christian community. That same Archbishop Rahho was himself murdered only nine months after Ganni's death, in the same city [refer #488].

Ragheed Aziz Ganni was born in the predominantly Christian city of Mosul, Iraq. After completing a degree in Civil Engineering at its University in 1996 and, after performing obligatory military service under the Saddam Hussein regime, he entered the seminary in Iraq. In 1996 Ganni's bishop sent him to Rome for further study. He is an alumnus of the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas Angelicum where he completed a Licentiate in ecumenical theology in 2003. He was ordained a priest in Rome on 13 Oct 2001.



During his study he resided at the Pontifical Irish College where he played soccer for the College. The annual showcase 5-a-side tournament, played in May between the Scots, English, Beda and Irish Colleges, has been named the "Ragheed Cup" in his honour.

Fr Ganni celebrated his first Mass in the chapel at the Irish College. Today he is one of the nine figures represented in the apse of that chapel where the relics of St Oliver Plunkett rest in the altar, wrapped in the priestly stole of Fr Ragheed. He regularly offered Mass for the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas which was at the time housed on their grounds.

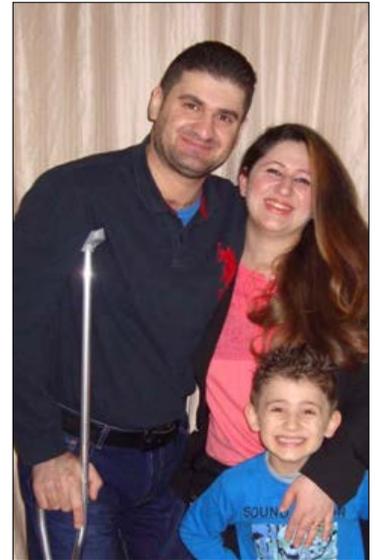
Fluent in Arabic, Italian, French, and English, Ragheed served as a correspondent for the international agency 'Asia News' of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

He was just finishing his degree in Rome when the Iraq war broke out. He had already received permission from his bishop to return to the Angelicum in Rome to work on a doctorate in ecumenism. In a pre-war interview he expressed his opposition to the invasion of Iraq fearing that Iraqi Christians would be targeted and persecuted. He looked forward to returning to his native

land to serve the Church and people there. He did so after Saddam Hussein was ousted from power in 2003.

The Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Bertone communicated to Fr Ragheed's bishop on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI saying that "Ragheed's sacrifice will inspire in the hearts of all men and women of good will a renewed resolve to reject the ways of hatred and violence, to conquer evil with good and to cooperate in hastening the dawn of reconciliation, justice and peace in Iraq."

I share this story to inform you that I am working on a project to help the family of this priest's sister, with support from members of the Union in Switzerland. Her name is Raghad, her husband's name Ziad. She herself was also wounded in a separate attack on their parish, in 2004. And, on top of that, Ziad was working in construction but fell and damaged his backbone.



After the death of Ragheed and the three deacons this family left Mosul and lived in the plain of Niniveh but, with the invasion of ISIS, they had to either convert to Islam or abandon everything. They left all behind and took refuge in Turkey and have lived there as refugees for the last two years. The parents of the priest finally managed to migrate to Australia last week, but the family of Raghad must still wait.

Our contact person for Iraq is always Fr Rebwar Audish Basa Basa who is currently doing doctorate studies in Rome. He is in the process of writing a book on the heroic death of Fr Ragheed, for the tenth anniversary of his martyrdom.

It is also worth recalling here that, with the direction of Fr Redwar, the UAC in Poland is financially assisting two orphanages in Niniveh which have been under the control of ISIS. The UAC Australia, likewise, is helping an orphanage for needy children in Congo DR. There are many such examples – in Brazil, India, Rwanda etc.

The point that I wish to make here is that the Union of Catholic Apostolate must not remain a convenient, comfortable ecclesiastical reality on paper, confined to mere discussions and meetings. Unfortunately it seems to be often so, according to my humble opinion. Seeing the dire needs in some parts of the world during my Visitations I took the initiative to encourage them to adopt these charitable activities, directly appealing to the NCC's in different countries. Next in line is the UAC in Switzerland, to support a few specific and needy families in Iraq.



When there is a genuine project for God's people money and generosity of heart will not be lacking. More than money though, this type of involvement will also foster the proper development of the Union imbuing it with a strong sense of mission. As Pope Francis reminds us continuously, the Union and the Church itself must not become a self-serving and self-referential reality. It has to move out to the peripheries.

May these good examples, of reaching out to the most deserving and vulnerable people around the world, give a new dynamism and sense of purpose to the Union of Catholic Apostolate. My prayers go out for both the innocent victims of war and atrocities and for the generous benefactors and good Samaritans of the Pallottine Family.

Today, 01 May, reminds us of that holy and wise man St Joseph, the Protector of the Holy Family and the Church. May this saint be the protector of God's people, especially in troubled nations.

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**sac asia oceania e-bulletin**

**you commented...**

**on #269** Two powerful reports on Peru on how the Lord moves among us and gives us the courage to live the Spirit life -- together. Thank you for sharing.

**MF 07.05.17**