

# Knights mobilize to aid Iraqi Christian refugees

The Knights of Columbus in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have joined a national effort to prioritize funding for the reconstruction and resettlement of Karamdes, a devastated Christian town in northern Iraq which was liberated from ISIS late last year.

The charge was made in a Sept. 18 letter signed by Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, the Knights supreme chaplain, and Stephen Cohen, Maryland State Deputy.

“Charity is the first principle of our order,” Cohen told the Review. “We like to be involved.”

The letter announced that the archdiocese donated \$10,000 toward the initiative and challenged the more than 80 councils in the Premier See to donate a minimum of \$2,000, the approximate cost of resettling a single family back into Karamdes, on the Nineveh Plain.

The local effort is part of a national goal to raise \$2 million for the reconstruction and resettlement of Karamdes, which was announced at the 135th Supreme Convention in St. Louis this summer by Supreme Knight Carl Anderson.

“While some fear returning to their ancestral villages,” Archbishop Lori and Cohen wrote, “others long to go home to their streets, their schools, their business and their churches.”

According to Forbes and other news sources, ISIS targeted Christians within the Nineveh Plains Aug. 6, 2014, causing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians to flee to Kurdistan, specifically in the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil. While the Nineveh region has been liberated of ISIS, the area was left uninhabitable.

For the reconstruction of Karamdes, the Knights will work with the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil, where four refugee camps were reported full in March.

Aid to the Church in Need, the Catholic charity for persecuted and other suffering Christians, estimates that around 12,000 homes need to be rebuilt within the entirety of the Nineveh Plains. The Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil has said the damage is not just physical, that reconciliation will also be required to ease people's fears.

According to Cohen, the Christian population in Iraq dropped from about 1.4 million a decade ago to approximately 250,000.

Starting Nov. 26, the Knights and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will hold a "Week of Awareness" for persecuted Christians. The Knights of Columbus' Christian Refugee Relief Fund has donated more than \$13 million towards Iraq, Syria and surrounding regions since 2014.

Cohen hopes to have the local fundraising goals met by the end of the year.