

# SANTA CROCE

PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY OF THE HOLY CROSS FOUNDATION



## SERVING CHRIST ON THE FRONT LINES PREPARING LEADERS FROM PERSECUTED COUNTRIES



Fr. Ajim, from Mosul, Iraq, experienced the terrifying occupation of ISIS in his country. Although his diocese in the province of Nineveh has been liberated from this occupation, the cities and people there need strong leadership to help them rebuild. Fr. Ajim is currently studying at *Santa Croce*, preparing to return to Iraq and continue serving his people.

ISIS may not be in America, but we all have been affected by the destruction they caused. As Catholics we cannot help but feel the horrendous sting of the many thousands of murdered Christians. Imagine living in daily fear for yourself and your family, knowing you could all be slaughtered at any moment for the simple fact of being a Christian.

One of our students, Fr. Ajim, a Catholic priest from the Christian city of Mosul, knows first-hand how terrible these attacks were for Iraqi Christians and how difficult the situation continues to be even after ISIS was driven out of northern Iraq. Tombs and places of worship were desecrated and destroyed. Homes belonging to Christians were often marked in red paint with the letter “N” for “Nazarat” (which means Christian), and their property stolen when families fled their homes, walking for miles to reach Christian cities where they would be safe.

Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city and the capi-

tal of the province of Nineveh, experienced religious genocide that cries out for justice and for support from the international community and particularly from Christians. Standing in solidarity with Fr. Ajim and other *Santa Croce* students from countries under at-



Fr. Ajim helped to relocate these orphans when ISIS occupied their city.

*continued*

tack by anti-Christian forces is very important. They will be the strong leaders these countries desperately need to support their people and strengthen their faith.

The devastation in Iraq seems all the more tragic because Catholics in Iraq are considered to be one of the oldest Christian communities in the world - with perhaps the most vital contribution to Christian history after Israel/Palestine. Our patriarch Abraham and the prophet Ezekiel were from southern Iraq. Jacob's sons, the twelve tribes of Israel, were all born in Iraq. Shrines to many other biblical prophets and saints are located throughout Iraq.

Father Ajim, had to leave Mosul when ISIS invaded and took control, killing thousands. But God gave Fr. Ajim



The photo shows a ruined church and religious statue in Mosul. In a recent interview published in the National Catholic Register, Syriac Catholic Archbishop Nathanael Nizar Semaan (Archbishop in the diocese of Nineveh) was asked about the return of Christians to Mosul. He said, "In the near future we might not have people going back to Mosul because everything is destroyed there." The diocese is currently operating out of the city of Qaraqosh. When Mosul is rebuilt, and Catholics feel safe to return, that city will need more priests like Fr. Ajim.

a mission: to take care of the orphans fleeing from destruction. Christian children poured into his orphanage in Alqosh from many cities taken by ISIS. One boy from Baghdad lost his parents because his father, a Christian store owner, sold alcohol, something worthy of death according to their Sunni neighbors. Christian, a 6-year-old boy, had seen so much destruction that he was petrified by the non-stop explosions and gunfire heard in Mosul 20 kilometers away. The only way for Fr. Ajim to calm him down was to cradle him and remind him over and over of Jesus' love.

One night, Fr. Ajim woke up all the children and told them they were going on a surprise vacation. They had to leave right away because the ISIS fighters were closing near



Despite persecution, destruction, and obstacles, Catholics in Iraq are strong in their faith. Archbishop Semaan reported that in Qaraqosh, "The St. Paul Center, which we rebuilt ... is full of pastoral activities: catechism, meetings, music. We had First Communion for around 400 children in April. Now we have summer catechism; around 800 people every day attending for two, three hours; and a women's meeting once a week, 1,000 women attending. The choirs, Masses, evening prayers, morning prayers — it's amazing." The advanced education of priests like Fr. Ajim is vitally important in providing Sacraments and instruction to Catholics in Iraq.

them. Fr. Ajim feared for the children's lives if ISIS arrived at the orphanage. He secretly fled with the children from Alqosh to the Christian city of Zahko close to the border of Turkey.

After arriving in Zahko he worked tirelessly to find homes of Christian families for all the children. Once Fr. Ajim found homes, he turned his attention to their continued Christian education, a greater challenge than ever in this war-torn region of northern Iraq.

Fr. Ajim realized he needed further education himself



Young children, like these orphans, need to be instructed in the faith so Iraq can retain its rich Catholic heritage. For that to happen, we need the best-trained priests. The same is true for many other countries where Christians are persecuted.

to carry on his task and headed to Rome. In 2017, Fr. Ajim arrived at *Santa Croce* to continue his own studies, so that he can go back and rebuild the lives and faith that have been so terribly impacted by the war.

If we want to help heal this world, we must offer Christ, we must support priests like Fr. Ajim, ready to teach, to show the love of Jesus of Nazareth, to bring the Sacraments to heal this world, to sacrifice everything to help children have a future, to help them grow in the Christian Faith.

They cannot do this without you and me! Support priests and seminarians like Fr. Ajim! Let's show our Christian brothers and sisters in the East that we won't abandon them! We have not forgotten them. ☩

## YOUR GIFT

Your gift will help Fr. Ajim and others like him to get the formation they sincerely need to continue their missions for Christ. An envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

- **\$50 covers the average monthly cost of general study materials**
- **\$100 covers the average monthly cost of transportation in Rome**
- **\$250 covers approximately 80 percent of average monthly basic academic fees**
- **\$500 covers the average monthly cost of food**

Your gift will help shape the future of the Church to ensure that the future leaders are properly formed to keep their focus on Christ and service to the Faithful.



Seminarians and priests from 86 countries expand their knowledge and faith at *Santa Croce*, learning from fellow students and their dedicated professors.



*Santa Croce* is located in the heart of Rome, the heart of the Catholic Church. Bishops send their most talented priests and seminarians here to become leaders for the future.



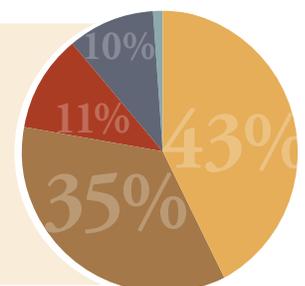
*Santa Croce* offers degrees in Theology, Philosophy, Canon Law, and Church Communications.

**SANTA CROCE'S 1,485 STUDENTS HAIL FROM 86 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES!**

**On behalf of all our students, THANK YOU! Your help makes a world of difference!**

STUDENTS BY LOCATION:

- Europe
- Americas
- Africa
- Asia
- Oceania (1%)



# MEET OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After thirteen years of faithful service Michael Gilstrap retired on May 1st and, on that same day, Colin Howell stepped in as our new Executive Director for the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross Foundation.

Colin's strong ties to *Santa Croce* increased after his conversion to Catholicism in 2010. Since 2012 he has been active in development for the University and the Church. He has collaborated and consulted in over fifteen countries and spent the past three years in Germany building up their Foundation to aid in the formation of priests from all corners of the world at *Santa Croce* in Rome.

Colin wrote the following about his time of transition back to the United States,

*"In March of this year, close to the end of my three-and-a-half-year tenure overseeing the German Foundation, we held a gala event in Bonn to introduce supporters to our new Patron, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, Prefect of the Papal Household and close friend of Benedict XVI.*

*Towards the end of the evening I was speaking privately with Archbishop Gänswein. He of course knew about my move to the United States and I told him that I would be stepping into the role of Executive Director for the U.S. Foundation. He immediately pulled out a napkin and asked me to write down my wife and children's names and promised that when he flew back to Rome the following day, he would promptly get us a private blessing for my family and the work of the U.S. Foundation from Benedict XVI, which was received the following evening.*

*I believe this blessing extends to us all who work and support this great effort. May Pope Emeritus Benedict's blessing be a strong impetus to move us to greater action for the future of the Church."*



Colin Howell with Archbishop Georg Gänswein: Prefect of the Papal Household and former professor at Santa Croce.

Colin has a deep passion for the formation of godly priests and sees *Santa Croce's* ineffable role in this great work. He believes,

*"There really is no measure to what God can do through those who wholly give themselves to His service, and we play a role in this. This is our mission: to help as many as possible get the formation they will need for the missions for which they have been called, to help lead as many souls as possible to their proper home in Christ. No other mission will ever come close in importance."*

Colin met his wife Catherine at *Santa Croce* where she finished her Doctorate in Canon Law. She is an adjunct professor at Notre Dame University where they live with their three children in South Bend, Indiana. 🇺🇸



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*The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross Foundation raises much-needed resources for the university's mission. To support the university, please contact the foundation by phone, email, or mail.*