

# POPE FRANCIS

LET US ACCOMPANY  
POPE FRANCIS IN IRAQ



**PRAYER**

The Novena

**HOMILIES**

Before, During & After

**STORIES &  
REFLECTIONS**

Timeline of Encounter

**PARISH OF ST. JOSEPH & ST. ANTHONY**

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## NOVENA FOR POPE FRANCIS & THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ

Pope Francis departs from Rome for Baghdad on Friday morning 5<sup>th</sup> March.

From March 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> our stories and reflections include our relationship in Australia to the Church in Iraq.

These include [peace](#), [education](#), [prayer](#) and [refugee settlement](#).

From March 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> the reflections concentrate on [the significance of the religious sites and major religious and secular meetings](#) during the Pope's visit.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> we pray for the Pope's [journey home, and recall significant moments](#).

On March 9<sup>th</sup> we pray for the [Church in Iraq](#) and the [nation of Iraq](#).

We pray the official Novena Prayer each day from March 1<sup>st</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup>

## STORIES & REFLECTIONS | TIMELINE OF ENCOUNTER

### DAY 1 – MONDAY MARCH 1<sup>st</sup> - PEACE

Today we recall our links to Iraq.

We remember the urgent call by Pope John Paul II for peace in Iraq.

As Pope, he had sent a special messenger to the US President, explaining that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

He had desired to visit Iraq himself, but the journey was cancelled due to safety concerns. In 2003 all Catholic churches around the world were asked by the Pope to pray for peace. Catholic Bishops, aid agencies and others echoed the call for peace.

With increasing hostility from Al Qaeda in 2008-2009, parishes in the five dioceses of Queensland were invited to join a roster in 2009, where parishes took it in turn to pray for the Christians in Iraq for a week.

The prayer roster was from Easter 2009 until December 2009.

During the first four days of the nine-day novena, article links from the Catholic Leader (2002 to 2021) are provided to recall our church partnership with the church in Iraq. Brisbane priest starts Iraqi campaign

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 1.

Fr Gerry

## DAY 2 – TUESDAY MARCH 2<sup>nd</sup> – EDUCATION

In late 2009, a request was made by Fr Bashar Warda (now Archbishop of Erbil), to participate in a dream to open schools, a university and a hospital in Erbil, Iraq for all people. He asked the Australian Catholic Church for educational and health Masters' scholarships.

A committee was established at ACU at the Brisbane campus.

The Holy Spirit Sisters were the major donors, assisted by other religious congregations. The Franciscan Sisters at Kedron in Brisbane housed the first two scholarship holders, Sister Azhar and Sr Samar from Iraq.

The Catholic Leader articles tell their story on the links below.

[Religious from Iraq start at ACU](#)

[Sisters studying in Brisbane for good of their Iraqi people](#)

[Iraq to gain from sisters' ACU stint](#)

When they returned to Iraq, they supported the urgent needs of internally displaced refugees. [Praying for Iraq sisters](#)

Later, Doctors Saveen and Ban completed their Masters' Degrees in Brisbane and returned to work in Erbil, Iraq in 2018. Fr Bernie Gallagher and the parish community of Banyo/ Nundah Parish welcomed them, and a generous parishioner provided accommodation for them. The Sisters of Mercy contributed financially to their living expenses.

[Iraqi couple studying in Brisbane to run hospital for people recovering from ISIS invasion](#)

[Medical couple studying in Australia returning home to run Iraq's first and only Catholic hospital](#)

Scholarship recipients have been supported in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney.

Hanar, an educationalist, has recently completed one Master's Degree at ACU Brisbane, and currently undertaking her second Master's Degree before returning to work in Erbil, Iraq

[Iraqi Catholic sent to ACU to support Erbil rebuild homes to be home for Pope's visit](#)

The role of Australian Catholic University ACU in supporting the establishment of a new University, CUE in Erbil is explained in this interview with Archbishop Warda,

[ACU offers hand of support in Iraq in time for Year of Mercy](#)

The ACU, with the support of the Australian Bishops, continue to offer Masters' Scholarships to Iraqi educational and medical professionals.

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 2.

Fr Gerry

### DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY MARCH 3<sup>rd</sup> – PRAYER

With the rise of violence due to the rise of ISIS in 2014, the continuing harassment by Al Qaeda, and by several militia units, Pope Francis and Bishops' Conferences around the world called for prayer for the peoples of Iraq and Syria, and the Churches there. Some parishes included a special intention in the Prayers of the Faithful at Masses, some asked for people to remember Iraq in their daily prayers, and others began prayer campaigns, inviting people beyond their communities to join in. Many staff and students of Catholic schools and colleges around Australia prayed for the people of Iraq.

One striking image of Iraq was a photo of a Christmas crib set among the temporary shelters in Erbil for the refugees from ISIS. Christmas 2014 had a deep sense of solidarity.

The Catholic Leader published several articles between 2014-2017 about prayer intentions and prayer campaigns. We can recall that feeling of solidarity by clicking on these links.

[Praying in hope with Christians of Iraq](#)

[Brisbane parish launches prayer campaign for peace in Iraq](#)

Some of the Iraqi Catholics had been in Australia for years.

One of the articles speaks of their appreciation for the prayer support for people back in Iraq. [Brisbane Iraqi Catholics appreciate prayer support](#)

In some communities and congregations there was a specific prayer intention for the release of Religious Sisters who had been taken hostage.

[Kidnapped religious sisters released in Iraq](#)

Iraqi priest, Fr Douglas Bazi visited Brisbane and outlined the suffering and pain Iraqi people suffered from ISIS and AL QAEDA. He thanked the Catholic Church in Australia for their support.

[Christians in northern Iraq in danger of 'disappearing forever', tortured priest says](#)

A Brisbane priest visited Iraq again in 2018 to witness the rebuilding efforts after the destruction by ISIS.

[Brisbane priest witnesses the Church and people of Iraq rebuilding after ISIS devastated their country](#)

On January 8th 2020, Syriac Catholic Archbishop Youhanna Boutros Moushe of Mosul, Iraq celebrated a Mass for Peace at St Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane. This was several hours after rocket attacks in Iraq.

[Iraqi bishop visiting Brisbane calls for fighting between 'big powers' to stop](#)

We continue that commitment of prayer today.

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 3.

Fr Gerry



#### DAY 4 – THURSDAY MARCH 4<sup>th</sup> – WELCOMING REFUGEES

In early 2016 our parish community was approached by MDA, the Brisbane settlement agency to welcome families to the Northside of Brisbane, from New Farm to Northlakes. St Paul's Parish Woodridge welcomed families in that region. More families went directly to Sydney and Melbourne where churches, mosques and community groups welcomed them.

During 2016, Videos in English and Arabic were prepared for the Northside of Brisbane, so that newly arriving refugees could view them in the first days after their arrival.

We are invited to view these welcome videos on this link.

<https://www.stjosephsbrackenridge.com/welcome-videos.html>

The Catholic Leader covered the welcoming with several articles, including:

The Welcome Dinner – Brisbane Northside

[Northside parish welcomes newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi families to dinner](#)

St Joseph's Primary School in Bracken Ridge was one of several Brisbane schools that welcomed Iraqi and Syrian students in 2016.

[Brisbane's newest Iraqi refugee intake have started school after years of terror](#)

Iraqi priest, Father Douglas Bazi thanked Australia for providing a home for Iraqi people who escaped the terrors in Iraq. Fr Douglas himself had been severely tortured by militants.

[Baghdad-born priest kidnapped and tortured by Islamic extremists says Australia is 'the promise land' for Iraqi Christian refugees](#)

We recall May 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 when the first families visited St Joseph's Church in Bracken Ridge. Everyone stood and applauded them. Such a welcome.

And the weekly Sunday morning teas until March 2020.

Several Christian Churches welcomed and supported them across the Northside of Brisbane and Logan.

Thank you for sharing in the memories.

Tomorrow let us accompany Pope Francis as he arrives in Iraq.

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 4.

Fr Gerry

## DAY 5 – FRIDAY MARCH 5<sup>th</sup> – POPE FRANCIS IN BAGHDAD

Today we pray as Pope Francis flies from Rome to Baghdad.

Upon arrival at **2pm**, he meets with the **Iraq Prime Minister** at the airport, followed the official welcome ceremony at the Presidential Palace at 3pm and a courtesy visit to the **President**.

At 3.45pm he meets with **authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps** at the Presidential Palace, and delivers a formal speech.

At 4.40pm, Pope Francis meets with bishops, priests, religious, consecrated persons, seminarians and catechists at 'Our Lady of Salvation' **Syro-Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad**. This Cathedral is where Al Qaeda militants massacred Christians on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2010. Members of our parish community had relatives who were martyred that day.

A Catholic Leader article (14 Nov 2010) speaks about this massacre, its impact on Christians at the time, and the need for hope.

[Archbishop prays for hope in Iraq](#)

Cindy Wooden from Catholic News Service explains the importance of this month's papal visit in her article <https://www.catholicnews.com/honoring-suffering-building-bridges%3A-papal-trip-to-iraq-has-dual-focus/>

There have been further rocket attacks this week in Iraq.

We pray for the safety of Pope Francis and all Iraqi people.

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 5.

Fr Gerry

DAY 6 – SATURDAY MARCH 6<sup>th</sup> – MORNING - INTERFAITH DIALOGUE; AFTERNOON – MASS

Today Pope Francis travel south to **Najaf**, where he visits the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Al-Husayni Al-Sistani at 9am.

He then travels to **Nassiriya**, for an interreligious meeting at the **Plain of Ur** at 11.10am. In Genesis we read of Abraham coming from Ur, the land of his birth. Pope Francis delivers an important speech at the Plain of Ur, as a pilgrim of peace.

He desires

“to pray together and to walk together, also with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, in the steps of Father Abraham, who joins in one family Muslims, Jews and Christians.”

He returns to **Baghdad** this afternoon and celebrates Mass 6pm at the Chaldean Cathedral of St Joseph.

A written copy of his homily will be available later.

Pope Francis speaks as a pilgrim, in the **steps of Father Abraham**, in his [Video Message](#) prior to his visit.

“I have greatly desired to meet you, to see your faces and to visit your country, an ancient and outstanding cradle of civilization. I am coming as a pilgrim, as a *penitent pilgrim*, to implore from the Lord forgiveness and reconciliation after years of war and terrorism, to beg from God the consolation of hearts and the healing of wounds. I am coming among you also as a *pilgrim of peace*, to repeat the words: *You are all brothers and sisters*” (Mt 23:8). Yes, I am coming as a pilgrim of peace, seeking fraternity and prompted by the desire to pray together and to walk together, also with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, in the steps of Father Abraham, who joins in one family Muslims, Jews and Christians.”

To the Christians of Iraq, Pope Francis speaks to them as a **Church of martyrs** and draws on **the hope of Abraham** long ago.

“I am honoured to encounter a *Church of martyrs*: thank you for your witness! May the many, all too many, martyrs that you have known help all of us to persevere with the humble strength born of love. You still have before your eyes the picture of homes destroyed and churches profaned, and in your hearts you still bear the hurt of affections left behind and dwellings abandoned. I want to bring you the affectionate caress of the whole Church, which is close to you and to the war-torn Middle East, and encourages you to keep moving forward. Let us not allow the terrible sufferings you have experienced, sufferings that grieve me deeply, to gain the upper hand. Let us not lose heart before the spread of evil. The ancient sources of wisdom of your lands point us elsewhere. They invite us to do as Abraham did. Even though he left everything behind, he never lost hope (cf. *Rom 4:18*). Trusting in God, he became the father of descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. Dear brothers and sisters, let us look to the stars above. For there is our promise.”



To **Christians, Muslims and Yazidi** Pope Francis speaks of the journey of **Abraham** and the prophecy **Jonah** as he says:

“Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of you over these years, you have who have greatly suffered, yet were never overwhelmed. Of you Christians and Muslims, of you peoples, like the Yazidi, who have suffered so greatly; brothers and sisters all. Now I am coming to your land, a land blessed yet wounded, as a *pilgrim of hope*. In your midst, from Nineveh, there resounded the prophecy of Jonah, who halted destruction and brought new hope, God’s hope. May we be infected by this hope, which inspires us to rebuild and begin anew. In these trying times of pandemic, let us help one another to strengthen fraternity and build together a future of peace. Together, brothers and sisters of every religious tradition. From here, thousands of years ago, Abraham began his journey. Today it is up to us to carry on that journey, in the same spirit, pursuing together the paths of peace! Upon all of you, then, I invoke the peace and the blessing of the Most High. And I ask all of you to do as Abraham did: to walk in hope and never stop looking to the stars above. I ask all of you too, please, to accompany me with your prayers.  
*Shukran! (Thank you!).*”

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 6.

Fr Gerry

## DAY 7 – SUNDAY MARCH 7<sup>th</sup> – POPE FRANCIS VISITS NORTHERN IRAQ

Today Pope Francis travels from **Baghdad to Erbil** in the northern Kurdistan region of Iraq. He will meet with the leaders of Kurdistan.

Then he travels outside of mountainous Kurdistan to the Nineveh Plains and visits Mosul and Qaraqosh.

In the Old Testament there are two prophetic books about **Nineveh (Mosul)**.

These Biblical Books are Jonah and Nahum.

You are invited to read these short books of the Bible this day.

Mosul was invaded by ISIS in 2014, and was liberated three years later.

Pope Francis will lead people in the *Prayer of Suffrage for the Victims of the War* at Hosh al-Bieaa (Church square) in **Mosul**.

At the beginning of the Book of Nahum, we learn that Nahum comes from **Alqosh**, a town to the north of Nineveh. In 2009 and in 2018, Fr Gerry visited the town of Alqosh and prayed at the remains of the ancient Jewish synagogue.

Pope Francis travels to the city of **Baghdeda**, known also as **Qaraqosh**.

Many of the Iraqi refugees who came to settle in northern Brisbane and Logan in 2016 and 2017, come from Qaraqosh. In 2018, Fr Gerry visited several churches damaged by ISIS, including the large Church of Immaculate Conception where Pope Francis will meet people and deliver a speech to them.

On this very busy day, Pope Francis returns to **Erbil**. He celebrates afternoon Sunday Mass at the **Franso Hariri Stadium**. His homily will be available online. And he returns to **Baghdad**.

Pope Francis is briefed on the Catholic University in Erbil. One of its projects is the BEEM Project for minorities in northern Iraq and supported by USAID. The initials stand for [‘Building Economic Empowerment for Minorities](#) in IKR and Ninawa Plains’

BEEM “aims to support minorities from different religious backgrounds and ethnicities, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), to gain employment skills that contribute to job placement, stabilizing households, and increasing standards of living. BEEM is designed to break down barriers among minority populations and provide access to available jobs. Four hundred male and female students will be provided with training in two centers Erbil and Telskuf.” We can learn more about it on this [link](#).

Earlier this week, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN International) revealed its new programme to provide university scholarships for 150 students at the Catholic University of Erbil over four years. They describe the project purpose “to promote social cohesion among the different religions and provide young Christian students with better employment prospects in the future.” [“Now is the time to invest in young people” - ACN is launching a major new project for Iraq](#)

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 7.

Fr Gerry

## DAY 8 – MONDAY MARCH 8<sup>th</sup> – POPE FRANCIS DEPARTS IRAQ

This morning, Pope Francis receives a special farewell at Baghdad airport, and returns home to the Vatican.

We ask ourselves which occasions, encounters, relationships, symbols and words over the last few days will shine forward as beacons of hope and as inspirations to work more closely together.

At the birthplace of Abraham, Pope Francis emphasised that Abraham and his journey are a common bond for us.

We commit ourselves to being hospitable and welcoming in a journey of peace.

*“The journey of Abraham was a blessing of peace.*

*Yet it was not easy: he had to face struggles and unforeseen events.*

*We too have a rough journey ahead, but like the great Patriarch,  
we need to take concrete steps, to set out and seek the face of others,  
to share memories, gazes and silences, stories and experiences.”*

*“It was precisely through hospitality, a distinctive feature of these lands,  
that Abraham was visited by God and given the gift of a son,  
when it seemed that all hope was past (cf. Gen 18:1-10).*

*Brothers and sisters of different religions, here we find ourselves at home,  
and from here, together, we wish to commit ourselves  
to fulfilling God’s dream that the human family  
may become hospitable and welcoming to all his children;  
that looking up to the same heaven, it will journey in peace on the same earth.”*

As we look back on this visit, we continue to place before God, the prayer from the historic Inter-religious Meeting on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> March, at the **Plain of Ur**.

As we thank God for our common relationship with **Abraham**, we pray as one family.

We reflect on the messages of some sections of the prayer first. Then we pray the full prayer on the link provided.

*The Prayer of the Children of Abraham* begins

*“Almighty God, our Creator,  
you love our human family and every work of your hands:  
As children of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims,  
together with other believers and all persons of good will,  
we thank you for having given us Abraham,  
a distinguished son of this noble and beloved country,  
to be our common father in faith.*

*We thank you for his example as a man of faith,  
who obeyed you completely,  
left behind his family, his tribe and his native land,*

*and set out for a land that he knew not.  
We thank you too, for the example of courage, resilience, strength of spirit,  
generosity and hospitality set for us by our common father in faith."*

During the prayer, there are specific intentions.

*"Make each of us a witness of your loving care for all,  
particularly refugees and the displaced,  
widows and orphans, the poor and the infirm.  
Open our hearts to mutual forgiveness and in this way  
make us instruments of reconciliation,  
builders of a more just and fraternal society.  
Welcome into your abode of peace and light all those who have died,  
particularly the victims of violence and war.  
Assist the authorities in the effort to seek and find the victims of kidnapping  
and in a special way to protect women and children.  
Help us to care for the earth, our common home,  
which in your goodness and generosity you have given to all of us."*

We are now invited to pray the full prayer at the link below.

[Prayer of the Children of Abraham \(+ introductory address\) - Pope Francis - 6 March 2021](#)

Let us pray [the Novena](#) for Day 8.

Fr Gerry

## DAY 9 - TUESDAY MARCH 9<sup>th</sup> - POPE FRANCIS VISITS NORTHERN IRAQ

We review this historic journey through photos and reflection.

This Vatican link provides a photo display of the journey of Pope Francis to Iraq.

<http://www.photogallery.va/content/photogallery/en/eventi/iraq2021.html>

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Pope Francis says of historic journey

*"In my time among you, I have heard voices of sorrow and loss, but also voices of hope and consolation.*

*This was due in large part to that tireless charitable outreach made possible by the religious institutions of every confession, your local Churches and the various charitable organizations assisting the people of this country in the work of rebuilding and social rebirth.*

*In a particular way, I thank the members of ROACO and the agencies they represent. Now the time draws near for my return to Rome.*

*Yet Iraq will always remain with me, in my heart.*

*I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to work together in unity for a future of peace and prosperity that leaves no one behind and discriminates against no one.*

*I assure you of my prayers for this beloved country.*

*In a particular way, I pray that the members of the various religious communities, together with all men and women of good will,*

*may work together to forge bonds of fraternity and solidarity*

*in the service of the good and of peace salam, salam, salam! Sukrán [Thank you]!*

*May God bless all! May God bless Iraq! Allah ma'akum! [God be with you!]"*

[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210307\\_omelia-iraq-erbil.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210307_omelia-iraq-erbil.html)

**Catholic News Service** has several articles.

<https://www.catholicnews.com/life-triumphs-over-death-as-christians-rebuild-in-iraq-pope-says/>

<https://www.catholicnews.com/papal-trip-to-iraq-influences-muslims-beyond-iraqs-borders-analyst-says/>

<https://www.catholicnews.com/living-the-beatitudes-can-change-the-world-pope-says-in-iraq/>

<https://www.catholicnews.com/update%3A-cleanse-your-hearts-of-anger-live-the-gospel-pope-says-at-mass-in-irbil/>

**Vatican News** coverage includes

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/an-overview-of-the-pope-s-historic-visit-to-iraq.html>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/ayuso-joy-over-meeting-with-grand-ayatollah-al-sistani.html>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/the-future-of-peace-in-iraq-and-the-faces-that-change-history.html>

Pope Francis has enabled considerable international media coverage on Iraq during his journey.

He has addressed the diplomatic corps and will continue to advocate for peace in Iraq.

He has highlighted the trauma and devastation of religious minorities.

He has spoken out against corruption, hatred and war.

He has provided a common link for Iraq by re-telling the story of Abraham.

He came as a pilgrim of peace.

The Iraqi Government has now decreed that the 6<sup>th</sup> March will become a "*National Day of Tolerance and Coexistence*" in Iraq.

May we continue our efforts for peace in Iraq, in the Middle East and in the world.

Today we pray for Iraq.

#### PRAYER FOR IRAQ

We pray to you, O God,

as *pilgrims of peace*,

for peace and justice,

for tolerance and co-existence,

for human rights and religious freedom,

for love and forgiveness,

in Iraq.

We pray to you, O God,

for our sisters and brothers in Iraq.

Amen.

Fr Gerry Hefferan and the Parish of St. Joseph & St. Anthony

9 March, 2021



## PHOTOGRAPHS | TIMELINE OF ENCOUNTER

**Please note: A work in progress**

## HOMILIES BEFORE, DURING & AFTER

[LET US ACCOMPANY POPE FRANCIS IN IRAQ THIS WEEK - 28 FEBRUARY 2021](#)

[THE TEMPLE CLEANSING & THE RED CARPET REFLECTION OF POPE FRANCIS - 7 MARCH 2021](#)

## **PRAYER NOVENA: PRAYER FOR THE VISIT OF POPE FRANCIS TO IRAQ**

**Lord, we entrust to you Pope Francis' trip to Iraq from 5 March.**

**May your Holy Spirit be in his gestures and words,  
and in the hearts of those who meet and listen to him,  
so that the gifts of encouragement, consolation,  
encounters between different ethnic groups,  
cultures and religions may spread,  
with the commitment to take courageous steps  
of reconciliation and collaboration for the common good.**

**We ask you, Lord, to grant the church in Iraq  
comfort, light and strength  
so that she keeps sewing the bonds  
of brotherhood and peace.**

**Lord, free Iraq and the countries of the Middle East  
from hatred and violence.**

**Amen**



**The prayer is on the Chaldean Patriarchate.  
We thank Hanar for translating one of the sentences - not in English - on the website.**