News



A Syrian earthquake survivor sits with her grandchildren inside the shell of her son's destroyed home in Aleppo Feb.13. (OSV News/Reuters/Firas Makdesi)



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Communities of women religious have stepped in following a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria Feb. 6 to help with shelter, food and other aid as the death toll neared 44,000 as of Feb. 17 and hope to find survivors waned.

In one of the hardest hit cities in Syria, a small community of Discalced Carmelites has welcomed taken about 50 people into their monastery in Aleppo, Fr. Raymond Abdo, provincial for the Discalced Carmelites in Lebanon and Syria, told the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) Feb. 15

The Curia of the Discalced Carmelites in Rome tweeted a message from the cloistered community of eight sisters immediately after the quake Feb. 6, saying they were "safe and sound" but "people are very scared because many buildings are falling down."

It was a fear shared by Sr. Anne Marie Gagnon of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, director of the Aleppo's St. Louis Hospital, who told ACN that while doctors and staff were still treating patients and trying to save lives, "at our hospital, there is a part that looks as though it may fall, the stones have moved, and we are afraid they will give out, but mostly we are focused on providing free care for the people who are injured right now."

In a Feb. 7 post on its website, the Catholic charity said other groups of women religious also have been helping with the recovery efforts but the quake has added an extra layer of fear and misery for the population.

"First a war, then COVID, then sanctions, and now an earthquake. The people are so poor: they don’t have money to eat, or oil to cook with, or grain," Gagnon told ACN.

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Though the earthquake has caused more widespread destruction and casualties in Turkey, Syria's conflict has made it difficult for humanitarian aid to enter, adding to the pain of an already suffering population.

Sr. Annie Demerjian, a member of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary in Aleppo, told the charity that even though the civil war has caused pain, fear and despair about the

future for Syrians, "You ask them about the earthquake that they were exposed to, the answer is just one word: horror," she told ACN.

A group of Trappist sisters in Azeir, Syria, called for an end to sanctions against the country, in light of the added pain Syria is undergoing. A Feb. 9 article in Asia News, a news agency promoted by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, said that the sisters, in a letter, called for an immediate stop to the sanctions, which the U.S. and other Western nations have imposed, and blamed them for making an already dire situation worse in Syria.

"The tragedy and suffering of so many dead who are still under the rubble ought to serve to help and provide hope to the living," they wrote in the letter.