

Fratelli Lebanon: Finding peace amidst the war

Fratelli Lebanon stands in the Land of the Cedars as a beacon of hope, amidst a situation that appears bleak following the revival of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah on 2 March.



More than a million people have been displaced as a result of the armed conflict, according to estimates by the United Nations (UN); meanwhile, UNICEF has stated that around 261 children have lost their lives since the escalation of violence in the country. Against this backdrop, the Israeli Defence Minister stated following his most recent visit to Lebanon on 18 October that much of the south of the country lay in ruins, with 23,000 homes destroyed.

It was against this bleak backdrop that the *Fratelli Lebanon Project* was launched 11 years ago, with the aim of “ensuring that all children have equal opportunities for a better future through education”, as stated on its website.

Seeking peace in the midst of war

Brother Guillermo Moreno, a missionary De La Salle Brother who has been living out his charism in the Land of the Cedars for six years, told *Vatican News* that the escalation of violence in March forced the missionaries to close the educational centre “for the children’s safety”, given that, “although Israel normally targets specific objectives, we know what wars are like and that things are not always as they might seem”.

“It’s true, it might seem a bit strange to say so, but for us the difference lies between hearing the bombs and seeing them. If we only hear them, that’s a good sign and we can carry on with our lives. When we actually see them, as happened in March, it means they’re very close.”

The Holy Father’s motto in November 2025, during his apostolic visit to Lebanon,

was precisely “Blessed are those who work for peace”, and it is the missionaries in this Middle Eastern country who are today engaged in a tireless struggle to achieve it; Moreno admitted that “although the situation remains complicated”, they have reopened their programmes and resumed educational courses as normal.

Their mission is based in Sidon, where they constantly take in displaced people; consequently, “the *Fratelli Project* has, since its establishment 11 years ago, been dedicated primarily to Syrian refugees and, to a lesser extent, Palestinians, but at present it is almost more important to assist the displaced people who are coming from the south into our area”; for this reason, he pointed out that, in their eagerness to help people in vulnerable situations, they have developed humanitarian aid projects.

“We’re still here; we’ve been here throughout the war. We’ve all decided to stay with the people. When they are displaced because the situation is horrible, we move with them. **We’re all in the same boat here; indeed, our project is called *Fratelli* because of the spirit of fraternity.**”

Fraternity, an essential part of their project

The *Fratelli Project* was founded on the principle of fraternity between the congregations of the Marist Brothers and the De La Salle Brothers, who responded to “Pope Francis’s invitation to go to the peripheries”, and it is in this spirit of inter-congregational communion that the missionaries in Lebanon “are living in community; there are more international volunteers who come to live with us, and then a whole team of educators – 60 people from Lebanon, Palestine and Syria – who work alongside us”.

However, the Project another aspect of living out their charism in a context of conflict, noting that, in addition to the problems they are dedicated to resolving, there is the impact of the war on the mental health of the educators and missionaries, who are distressed by the “permanent state of tension, conflict and economic crisis”. He also explained that this is a challenge they do not face alone, but one that affects the entire population, “but the Lebanese are a very resilient people; it seems as though they were born to survive”.

“Take September 2024, for example, when we had to close for three months and there were hundreds of bombs falling around our centre [...]. Within the

community itself, we had volunteers and Brothers, and one by one we decided to stay and remain by the people's side, because we realised that we were among the few in the area who could act as a bridge between humanitarian aid and the population that was suffering."

Education, training and empowerment

Teaching seems to be just one part of the wider range of skills and objectives that *Fratelli Lebanon* has sought to address over 11 years of work. From educating the youngest children to running vocational training, women's empowerment and language programmes, these are just some of the projects the missionaries carry out in this Middle Eastern country.

"It's not a school," expressed Brother Guillermo, "it's a socio-educational centre. We have 20 literacy programmes, including, for example, programmes for mothers with babies; we teach the mothers how to look after their babies, whilst we have a *babysitter* who looks after them whilst the mothers learn how to care for them. We have vocational training programmes: sewing, electrical work and hairdressing. As well as programmes for adults to learn Arabic, IT and English; we run support programmes for young girls and boys, sports programmes and recreational activities for young people and teenagers."

A project that goes beyond borders

For Brother Guillermo Moreno, peace does not come about on its own; it is a concept that encompasses justice, fraternity and respect. "We in the educational team represent eight different religious denominations and all manner of ideologies; our beneficiaries come from various nationalities, and we all live as one family. We place great emphasis on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters, and that is what fosters peace."

The Spanish missionary also pointed out that the children receiving support from *Fratelli* feel safe and protected whilst at the socio-educational mission centres. It is for this reason that *Fratelli* has even expanded to Maicao, in Colombia, to bring its support to Venezuelans displaced by the socio-political crisis.

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