Welcome

It’s impossible to say in a few words how grateful we are for your support in 2019 and in so many cases over many, many years. One extraordinarily generous donor gave us £250,000. We hope you are reading this. Thank you.

Your prayers, commitment and financial support are helping our partners change lives for the better. They, and we, are enormously grateful. The challenges, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable, continue to multiply in a region beset by violence, instability and uncertainty.

We are delighted to have begun working in 2019 with new partners in Iraq, especially CAPNI (page 9) and to see established partners like Zvartnotz (page 5) totally transform their capacity to bring new life and hope to the most vulnerable, including children living with disabilities.

Mark Calder, our Regional Manager for Scotland and the North of England, ran 1,725 miles last year to raise awareness and funds to support refugees returning to Iraq. What an amazing achievement. His blog at runninghome2019.co.uk describes the extraordinary people and experiences he encountered along 14 pilgrim routes. Read it; it will inspire you, and help you think about running your own marathon for Embrace in 2020!

2020 is a big year for us. We have begun work on a new five year plan to run from 2021 and in 2024 Embrace celebrates 170 years of mission. With your help we want to ensure that Embrace’s efforts to transform the lives of vulnerable people in the Middle East delivers for at least another 170.

Tim Livesey
Chief Executive

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Front cover: © Paul Jeffrey
New beginnings

The challenges of the Middle East’s political and social situation are constantly shifting, and our Christian partners have to be ready to meet the changing needs. We don’t know what the year 2020 will bring, but we do know that our partners will continue to put their hearts and souls into confronting poverty and injustice in their communities. In this New Year edition of Embrace, we’d like to share with you some of the latest support we’ve pledged to their work. Thank you for being there for the Middle East’s Christians as they put their faith into practical action.

Art without walls in Egypt

‘There is no need to fear the “other”’, says Nader Abdelmalak, Director of the Arkan Cultural Centre in Alexandria, Egypt. ‘There are many people who are ready to participate in a friendly way – extremists only represent a tiny minority in Egyptian society.’

Nader’s work, supported by you, aims to reduce that minority even further. The Arkan Centre is an arts project uniting young Christians and Muslims in an environment of religious harmony, where extremism is overcome by creativity and hope.

In recent years, Islamist militants have frequently targeted Egyptians and tourists, with Coptic Christians under particular threat. The number and severity of terrorist attacks declined in 2018 and 2019, but extremist groups remain simmering in the background.

Although the centre is based at St Mark’s Pro-Cathedral, many young Muslims are keen to attend its creative courses, exhibitions and workshops. Word has spread that it is a safe place for people of all backgrounds to express themselves through art, and to learn new skills that could lead to a creative career.

Some young people are vulnerable to their ideology, but many more reject these narratives of hatred and want to build bridges between communities. By bringing young people together, the Arkan Centre encourages a whole generation to respect each other’s differences.

The centre offers training in video and photo editing, photography, marketing and animation – all skills increasingly in demand from employers.

Arkan’s annual exhibition, ‘Art Without Walls’, showcases the work of hundreds of artists and attracts visitors from all over Alexandria. It’s a celebration of talent and togetherness, and a vibrant symbol of hope for Egypt’s next generation.

‘We believe now that this project is a peace building project at the grass roots level,’ says Nader. ‘It is always rewarding to remove barriers preventing communities coming closer in shared activities. We always need to build bridges to reach others for a better future for all.’

Hundreds of Muslim and Christian artists showcase their work at the Arkan Centre’s annual exhibition, ‘Art without walls’.

Young people can learn vital skills to help them get a job at the Arkan Centre.
The difference you’ve made

Medicine on the front line in Gaza

When the US government’s international development organisation, USAID, withdrew funding from Palestine the future for Caritas health care clinic was uncertain.

With Gaza’s healthcare situation at breaking point due to limited resources and high levels of disease caused by overcrowding and lack of sanitation, the clinic was designed to take the pressure off other health services and help people from remote parts of Gaza to access treatment in the city. But with limited funding, healthcare for Gaza’s poorest looked bleak.

But thanks to you, we were able to respond to Caritas’ emergency request for help, and offered funding alongside other agencies to ensure that the clinic remained open and was there when people like Amir needed it.

During the Great March of Return which started in Gaza in March 2018, 12-year-old Amir was one of thousands who gathered at the perimeter fence between Gaza and Israel to protest. But Amir was also one of thousands who were shot by the Israeli Defence Force during the violence.

Both Amir’s legs were broken and he suffered multiple open wounds. Thankfully, the Embrace-supported mobile clinic was on hand to give him emergency care and refer him on to follow-up services.

Since then, thanks to you, we have been able to carry on funding Caritas’ vital healthcare work. For now, they are concentrating on making sure that the poorest people in Gaza, who would not be able to afford healthcare for themselves, get the treatment they need. But things change rapidly in Gaza and Caritas remain vigilant in case the wound clinic will be needed again.

Whatever happens, because of your generosity, the clinic will still be there to help those who need it.

Caritas are able to travel to the most vulnerable communities in Gaza thanks to the mobile clinic you’ve helped support.

Caritas have been responding to emergency requests of wounded people from the Great March of Return.
Zvartnotz’s new purpose-built centre will help children, young people and adults with learning disabilities access first-class facilities needed to nurture their talents and full potential.

Thanks to your support, Zvartnotz were able to renovate their building to be fully accessible for people living with disabilities in Lebanon.

The Zvartnotz Centre in Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon, champions the right of people with learning disabilities to train for jobs and be accepted in society. For many years, we have supported their workshops, which ran in premises kindly offered by the Armenian Evangelical Church. In order to grow their work, they needed to move into a bigger, more suitable building. Thanks to your support, Embrace has contributed to the renovation of a brand new purpose-built centre, and students are already moving in.

The fully accessible building features a sensory room, three vocational workshops, a physiotherapy room, academic classrooms, therapy facilities, a conference area and a kitchen.

Sana, 27, is one of the students who will benefit from the new centre. She lives with her parents and two brothers in a one-bedroom basement apartment about 20 minutes’ walk away.

Five years ago Sana’s mother encouraged her to find a way of learning new skills so that she can get a job. It was important to Sana to prove herself as an independent and productive member of society, so when she heard about the Zvartnotz Centre, it sounded exactly what she was looking for. She joined the assisted workshop and learnt skills in catering and handicrafts. But it was in painting that her talent truly lay, and she now focuses on creating canvases to sell in the workshop’s bazaar.

‘The workshop is the most important part of my life,’ Sana says. ‘It is here where I can feel responsible and capable of living life like the rest of my family members. Before, I was aimless – I spent my days sleeping because I had nowhere to go, nothing to do, and I was lonely. Here, I learnt that each one of us is differently able. I can draw beautiful paintings and sell them to people who appreciate my work. I can dream of a better future.’

Thanks to you, Sana and many others will have the first-class facilities they need to nurture their talents and reach their full potential.
The difference you’ve made

Prioritising women’s health in Egypt

CEOSS run breast cancer awareness sessions to help raise the importance of self-examination and arrange free mammograms in the community.

‘My mother had breast cancer,’ says Wafaa, 47, who lives in south Cairo, ‘and I was very afraid to get the disease. I was having intrusive thoughts about it and imagining strange lumps in my breasts.’ Medical investigations, however, would be impossibly expensive. Wafaa is a single mum of four and gets by earning some money from sewing. Her teenage sons contribute by fitting casual work around their studies.

So Wafaa’s anxiety continued … until a chance encounter in a bread queue. She got chatting to the woman in front of her, who mentioned how she had received a free mammogram. The woman gave Wafaa the phone number of a new breast cancer service.

Wafaa’s mammogram showed that she did not have breast cancer – an outcome that has made a huge difference to her mental health.

‘I was very miserable about the possibility of having a tumour,’ she says. ‘Then through the project I had a mammogram for free and the result was that I am free of the disease. I am very happy and relieved. This project has helped me return to a happy and stable life.’

In communities where women’s health is often not a priority, and medical services are difficult to access, initiatives like the breast cancer project truly save lives. Thank you for the generous donations that make this vital work possible.
You can still give embraceme.org/jojo

Thank you from JoJo

You may remember JoJo, whose story we told in our Harvest appeal. JoJo’s family owned three successful shops in the Christian Assyrian town of Tellesqof in northern Iraq. But in the August heat of 2014, ISIS entered the town and people were forced to flee, in fear for their lives. Eventually it became safe to return, but JoJo’s home and businesses were gone. The hard work of many years was lost to the ground and JoJo and his family were left with nothing.

When we first met JoJo, he was one of millions of internally displaced people who dream of rebuilding the lives and communities they once knew. Since then, in partnership with the Christian Aid Programme Nohadra Iraq (CAPNI) we are helping JoJo get back to business by providing him with a loan so he can establish new premises and buy stock.

When we last saw JoJo he wanted to say ‘Thank you’ for helping him get back on his feet.

You can still give embraceme.org/jojo

Because of your support, JoJo was able to establish new premises for his business.

Thank you from Gaza

‘We at Al Ahli Hospital and the vulnerable people we serve are very grateful to Embrace continuous support to our mission of healing in Gaza.

Without this support, many would be deprived of access to proper health care. Thank you for keeping the light of hope in the lives and hearts of people in Gaza.’

Dr Suhaila Tarazi,
Al Ahli Hospital

You can still give embraceme.org/gaza

You’ve kindly given £97,000 to help provide life-saving healthcare to people in Gaza.

Vulnerable people in Gaza are receiving urgent medicines at Al Ahli Hospital thanks to your support.
For most people just finishing a single marathon would be a challenge. But 14 in one year? That is superhuman!

It’s the challenge Mark, our Regional Manager, took on in 2019 to help raise money and awareness for Iraqi refugees returning home after war.

And he’s done it! Since the last issue, Mark ran over 450 miles, and has crossed the finish line of Running home. He has run 1,725 miles across the pilgrimage paths of Scotland and North of England, finishing his final run on November 16.

Mark says: ‘And so it ends. 14 ultramarathon pilgrimages, 33 full running days (plus a few extra mornings), roughly 200 mid-run check-ins, 57 church engagements, 25 offers of overnight accommodation, 20 running partners, seven separate pairs of shoes, five falls (three descending to Ballachulish mind you), three toe nails, one lost running day, and one heckle ...

... I’ve mentioned before that that common refrain of pilgrims, that “every ending is a beginning”. Never has it felt truer than now.’

Thanks to your support, you’ve helped raise over £50,000 to help Iraqi refugees. Your donations, prayers and words of encouragement helped keep Mark going, too, especially through the toughest times of the run.

And as our Iraqi partners continue to support their communities, you can still donate to help them carry out their vital, life-changing work:

- Call: 01494 897950 to donate
- Donate online at runninghome2019.co.uk/give

You have raised over £50,000 to help Iraqi refugees rebuild their lives.

Mark was joined by friends, family and supporters on a number of runs throughout Running home.
Helping communities grow

Violence and unrest isn’t the only threat to the security of people in the Middle East. In early 2019, an unprecedented period of prolonged heavy rain jeopardised the farming communities in the Nahla Valley in Iraqi Kurdistan. But thanks to you, we stepped in to help repair the damage.

The rain sent rocks, soil and trees tumbling into the traditional irrigation channels, blocking the supply of water for farmland and, in some villages, cutting off the drinking water too. Most people in the area rely on agriculture but the planting season was ruined, resulting in a poor harvest. The local communities turned to CAPNI for help.

With your support, Embrace has enabled CAPNI to clear and reconstruct the channels, as well as reinforcing them wherever possible against future climate events. At least 600 families will have their water restored and be able to plant their crops for 2020.

Thanks to your support of Running home, CAPNI were able to clear and reconstruct channels, helping restore water to the homes of many families.

Read page 8 to hear how you’ve helped JoJo restart his business in Iraq.
Fundraising, news and events

Save the date: Annual Lecture 2020

Our popular Annual Lecture is back again this year. Join us to delve deeper into the challenges facing Christians in the Middle East today. Speakers and theme to be announced shortly.

Date: Thursday 25 June
When: Doors open at 6.30pm
Where: St Margaret’s Church, Westminster Abbey, London, SW1P 3JX

Tickets must be booked in advance.
Bookings will open soon. Sign up for our email, Re:Action, at embraceme.org/reaction to hear more. We’ll update you in our next magazine on the theme and speakers for the event!

Contact: info@embraceme.org or 01494 897950 for more info

Seeds of Hope Harvest prayers

Last October, hundreds of you across the country sent us your Seed prayer cards, which were part of our Harvest Resources to help Egyptian families living in poverty grow new, life-giving futures.

We traveled to Egypt to give our partner, Anafora, these cards. And they were overjoyed to receive them. Thank you to everyone who shared prayers with us.

Visit embraceme.org/resources to see our range of resources for you and your church.

We traveled with a group of volunteers to Egypt, where we gifted our partner, Bishop Thomas and Sara Hannan from Anafora, your Seed prayer cards.
Pray with us

Our latest six-month Prayer Diary is out now. It features prayer prompts and requests from our partners on behalf of the people they serve – and themselves – as well as creative prayer ideas and more.

If you’d like to receive a Prayer Diary, which is issued twice a year, let us know:

- Call our Supporter Care Team: 01494 897950
- Email: info@embraceme.org
- Request copies or download for free: embraceme.org/pray

You can use the prayers in your church services, in your prayer groups, or during private prayer at home.

You’re welcome to reproduce the prayers in your church newsletter – we’d love to encourage others to pray for Middle East Christians and the people they serve.

Volunteer for Embrace

Have you been inspired reading about the work of our Christian partners in this issue? Do you want to change lives in the Middle East? We’re always looking for people to kindly offer their time and talents to help spread the word of our mission. By joining our network of volunteers or Church Ambassadors, you’ll play your part in fighting poverty and injustice!

Visit embraceme.org/volunteer or call 01494 897950 to find out more and get involved.

Community fundraising heroes!

Gill invited Mark and his family to celebrate her 70th birthday dedicated to Running home.

- Gill hosted a 70th birthday party with money going to Running home. Generous people at her celebration raised £2,260. Thank you.

- One of our many dedicated volunteers, Minyon, ran a stall at her local table top sale and raised £57 with her homemade items. Thank you for your continued support, Minyon.

- The Rotary Club of Harlow Tye held their yearly sponsored abseiling event, raising £2,300 for our partner Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. Thanks to Dianne, who suggested Al Ahli to receive donations, and everyone at the club who took part.

- A Christian’s Together group in Alnwick raised £500 hosting displays of different nativity scenes at St Paul’s Church - with plenty of cake and coffee!

We love sharing stories of your generosity. Tell us what you’re doing at share@embraceme.org
Journey to the cross

Lent Study Guide
Written by Pippa Durn

Our brand new study guide features six inspiring sessions to nourish your faith. Follow in Jesus’ footsteps, meeting the people he met and learning more about the extraordinary Christians of today’s Middle East.

Order online at shop.embraceme.org or call 01227 811646

£2 for 1 or £10 for a pack of 6