



Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross

Information and brief biographical details for  
**Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross**

**Representative of the “Mussalaha” Reconciliation Initiative  
&  
Spokesperson for the Catholic Media Centre of the Diocese of  
Homs, Hama and Yabroud, Syria**

Visit to Ireland 9th - 12th August 2012

**Church:** The Melkite greek-Catholic Church\*

**Entered Religious Life:** 1971, Carmelite Order, Lebanon

**Position:** Mother Superior of the Monastery of St. James the Mutilated - Unity of Antioch Order, Qara, Homs Syria

**Monastery Website:** <http://www.maryakub.org>

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\* The Melkite greek-Catholic Church is an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Holy See. The Melkites are Byzantine rite Catholics of Middle Eastern origin and are the descendants of the early Christians of Antioch (Syria). Christianity was established in this area of the Middle East by St. Peter in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

## **A Quest for Truth, Justice and Peace**

Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross is no stranger to the disastrous consequences of conflict. From the time of her birth, her family background informed her of the effects that an unjust conflict can inflict upon a community. Having lived through the period of the Lebanese Civil War 1975 – 1990, and the 1982 War on Lebanon, she is ever mindful of the terrible consequences and human cost of war. Likewise, in a Middle East context, she understands the dangers that come from seeking to divide communities along confessional and sectarian lines.

During the current crises in Syria, M. Agnes Mariam has played a prominent role in helping those who suffer as a result of the conflict, giving shelter and assistance at the monastery to those in need; all without distinction to their religious or political affiliation. She has not been afraid to challenge certain Western media perspectives on the events in Syria and her testimony and personal witness to events in the district of Homs - one of the most troubled areas of the conflict - contrasts with the commonly accepted Western narrative. M. Agnes Mariam, alongside her monastic community, has tried to hold the middle ground throughout this difficult period and has negotiated with both the state and the opposition for the benefit of peace and stability in the district. In 2011, she facilitated a visit to Syria of a group of Catholic journalists. This group was the first in the world to have noted that the civilian population was a target of violence and not just the violence which emanated from the regime. M. Agnes Mariam has been consistent in speaking about the actuality rather than the perception of events in Syria. She has placed her own life at risk by entering zones of conflict to personally verify events, collect evidence and provide protection to witnesses. Among other things, she has taken issue with and directly challenged the U.K based Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, questioning the accuracy of their widely quoted casualty lists.

**Full position Statement of the monastery St James regarding events in Syria. Approved and signed by Bishop, Mgr. Elie Rahal**  
(original in French) [http://www.maryakub.org/Article\\_positions\\_du\\_monastere\\_St\\_Jacques\\_le\\_Mutile\\_par\\_rapport\\_aux\\_evenements.html](http://www.maryakub.org/Article_positions_du_monastere_St_Jacques_le_Mutile_par_rapport_aux_evenements.html)

## **“Mussalaha” the “Reconciliation” Initiative**

The "Mussalaha", which means "Reconciliation", is an extraordinary community-based non-violent popular initiative born within the civil society of Homs; a city which has been torn apart by the conflict between the regular army and opposition forces. Founded at community level, it has arisen spontaneously from within civil society and includes members of all ethnic and religious communities who are tired of war. It stands as a demonstration of hope that a "third way" alternative to armed conflict is possible and provides an alternative to any military intervention from abroad. "Mussalaha" fills a void created by the noise of weapons: it does not side with any of the warring parties, rather it embraces all. The movement says "No" to the continued loss of life which is 'bleeding the nation white'. The initiative says "No" to civil war and rejects all forms of sectarian violence and sectarian

denominational strife. The initiative took shape with the organisation of two meetings held in early June in Homs, meetings which enjoyed extraordinary popular participation. They were attended by members of all communities and represented the diverse mosaic that is Syrian society: Alawites, Sunnis, Druze, Christians, Shiites and Arabs. These meetings have already had an extraordinary and unimaginable result: joint declarations, hugs and solemn commitments, reconciliation between groups, families and Alawite and Sunni communities (the main protagonists of the current conflict) have been sanctioned - publicly committing to "building a reconciled and peaceful Syria" in the name of mutual respect.

Despite the continuing conflict the initiative continues to gain ground. It is imperative at this time that the "Mussalaha" reconciliation initiative is recognised, nurtured and supported by all who believe in peace through dialogue at this critical time.

*"I believe that the initiative 'Mussalaha' should be encouraged and supported by all. Reconciliation, although it is sometimes hard to accept, is a way not to be left out and should not be underestimated"*

**His Exc. Mgr. Giuseppe Nazario, OFM, Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo**

*"We must put ourselves in the shoes of the Syrian people and find peaceful ways to stop this mad rush toward a war that mothers, fathers and sons of Syria do not want and do not deserve.... We urgently need to support those working for peace in Syria and are looking for a way to help the 22 million Syrians to resolve their conflict, without promoting violence or chaos."*

**Mairead Maguire, Irish Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and co-founder of the Peace People**

### **Personal Biography of Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross**

Born in a refugee camp in Lebanon, Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross is the daughter of a Lebanese mother and a Palestinian father who fled Nazareth in 1948. In her teen years, she rebelled and parted from her family, travelling continents in search of meaning and context in life. After a period of rebellion and searching she found her purpose in life through the expression of faith and after returning to Lebanon she joined the Carmelite order in 1971. In 1992 she received the blessing and permission of her community to serve the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church in her monastic vocation, travelling to France to study the Syriac and Hebrew monastic traditions. She also has a specialisation in Icons and the study of Iconography. In 1994 she began the work of establishing a new monastic foundation in Syria and thus commenced the restoration of the ruined ancient 6<sup>th</sup> century Monastery of St. James the Mutilated near Qara in the Diocese of Homs, Syria. Over the last 18 years the Monastery and the order she established there has become an integral part of life in the district serving the local and wider community. In 2010 the monastery welcomed 25,000 visitors both from Syria and the international community. Mother Agnes Mariam is spokesperson for the Catholic Media centre of Homs and a member of the "Mussalaha" Reconciliation Initiative. She is currently travelling in Europe to highlight and promote the initiative.

**Full personal biography of Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross The Mother Superior of St. James Monastery** (original in English)

[http://www.maryakub.org/Article\\_Temoignage\\_Mere\\_Agnes\\_en.html](http://www.maryakub.org/Article_Temoignage_Mere_Agnes_en.html)

References:

SYRIA - "Reconciliation": in Homs Syrian civil society take to the fields for a non-violent solution 12/06/2012

<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31710&lan=eng>

SYRIA - "Peace in Syria": the popular movement for reconciliation "Mussalaha" grows 27/06/2012

<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31816&lan=eng>

SYRIA - The Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo supports the effort of reconciliation of "Mussalaha" 16/07/2012

<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31930&lan=eng>

Listen to the Voices of Peace in Syria; Mairead Maguire 30/06/2012

[http://www.progressive.org/voices\\_of\\_peace\\_in\\_syria.html](http://www.progressive.org/voices_of_peace_in_syria.html)

**Melkite Catholic Church has in the region of 1.6 million adherents worldwide of which approximately three quarters of a million are based in the Middle East (one quarter of a million in Syria, over a third of a million in Lebanon and the remainder dispersed through other parts of the Middle East). Hundreds of thousands are now dispersed in the Diaspora throughout America, Australia and Europe.**