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CONTENTS:

- Christmas in Iraq
- Teresian activities in Puerto Rico
- The Teresian app is now available in Spanish
- "Staunch friends of God," an international musical project for the 5th Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa

Iraq

Christmas in Iraq

Iraq, January 9, 2015 (Communicaciones).- Fr. Ghadir, ocd. Just as in any year, Christmas preparations take a lot of time and energy. Christmas night in Fatima (Baghdad) passed without incident. Despite the threats that terrorists cast against the churches several days before, about 200 people gathered together for that night and also for the Masses that I celebrated in our convent in Duhok. There were almost too many people for the space in our small chapel!

A week before Christmas, we were able to organize ourselves to attend to the almost 450 Christians currently settled in our school in Baghdad and about 1,100 persons in Duhok. The majority of the latter are Yezidi who live however they can in tents in different camps. During these feast days, generous rations of food and Christmas gifts (also for the Yezidi, since this year their feast days coincided with ours) and bags of chocolates and candy for the children were distributed, and a half-day's recreation with the youngest ones was spent (in Baghdad as well as in Duhok).

During the week before Christmas, I attended a preparatory session for the season with priests, men and women religious, and consecrated lay persons in Baghdad, with Bishop Sako, Chaldean Patriarch, whose idea it was of doing something together. I also participated in a communal, penitential celebration that brought together youth groups from different churches in Baghdad. We ended the year with a prayer vigil before the Blessed Sacrament in our chapel in Duhok.

The situation is fragile since, despite attempts in northern Iraq against ISIS, clashes and attacks between the Iraqi armed forces and the jihadists continue every day, with civilian victims. Unfortunately, kidnapping is reoccurring in Baghdad and the financial situation is catastrophic with frequent power outages (up to 12 blackouts in a day!).

The future is bleak. Even if Christian towns are liberated, returning to homes will not be immediate because of the desolate conditions; everything has been pillaged and destroyed. Along these lines we give thanks to all our brothers and sisters in Carmel, the Discalced Carmelite nuns, and so many benefactors who know how to give hope in the midst of this tragic situation. In the name of all the refugees... an infinite thanks.

5th Centenary

Teresian activities in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico, January 9, 2015 (Communicationes).- The Catholic University of Puerto Rico, the second largest in that country, has signed a collaboration agreement with the International Teresian-Sanjuanist Center in Ávila (CITeS) to develop and carry out several Teresian activities for the 5th Centenary.

The International Congress on Mysticism will have a distinctly Teresian bent in 2015. Francisco Javier Sancho, CITeS director, will be among the speakers and will give the keynote address. Also presenting will be professors from Harvard and Oxford universities and specialists from other universities. The Congress will take place on April 9 and 10, 2015, in the auditorium of the University.

Related summer courses will be offered in psychology and spirituality for postgraduate students and professors.

Work is also underway to create a master's degree in Mysticism and Humanities to be offered in the academic year 2015-2016. The format will require some actual class time and the program is designed to be two years long.

App

The Teresian app is now available in Spanish

Austria, January 9, 2015 (Communicationes).- To commemorate the 500th year of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus, the Discalced Carmelites of Spain and Austria have created a Smartphone app with which you can receive free daily texts taken from the Saint's works and the Gospel of the day. The application has been available since January 1.

The texts were chosen by Father Ulrich Dobhan, OCD. The app was created under the direction of the Austrian province in collaboration with the provinces of Paris, Castile, Venice, Croatia, and California-Arizona.

Find and download the app for iPhones in the Apple app store by searching for **STJ500**.

Music

“Staunch friends of God,” an international musical project for the 5th Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa

Avila-Spain, January 9, 2015 (Communicationes).- “Amigos Fuertes de Dios” (“Staunch friends of God”) is a musical project edited by the Society of Saint Paul Press that arises out of love for Santa Teresa, the universal traveller, on the occasion of the 5th centenary of her birth.

The disc has 16 songs created and interpreted by some of the most renowned Christian singer-songwriters in the world.

Rogelio Cabado, pastoral music coordinator for the 5th Centenary, organized the collaboration of artists from Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Latin America, with musical adaptation by David Gómez.

The songs, based on Saint Teresa’s writings, transmit her message, which is joyful, fresh, and relevant to our times.

The disc has a selection of instrumental and sung pieces, with a young spirit and modern rhythms which are ideal for evangelization, prayer, and contemplation.

“The initiative arises from the Discalced Carmel. From the start we knew we wanted the participation of the best musicians in the world and to carefully protect the graphic, literary, and artistic facets of this project,” said Rogelio Cabado.

Cabado also expressed that the songs, composed exclusively for the CD, are an invitation into the joy of the faith, interiority of the heart, and an explosion of musical and literary wealth.