

# COMUNION



General Curia, Rome



The cathedral of our Lady of Arabia (BAHREIN)



## ANNOUNCEMENT

Fr Aldo Berardi is the new Apostolic Vicar of North Arabia. Appointed by the Pope, the Trinitarian religious, currently Vicar General of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives, succeeds Bishop Camillo Ballin who passed away at the age of 75 due to illness, in Rome on 12 April 2020. After Bishop Camillo Ballin's death, Bishop Paul Hinder, Apostolic Vicar of South Arabia, was appointed as Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate of North Arabia to ensure continuity and help in the necessary transition.

## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER GENERAL

With a heart full of joy and gratitude, I announce you that the Holy Father Francis has appointed as Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Arabia North our brother Fr. Aldo Berardi, so far Vicar General of the Order, raising him to episcopal dignity.



This appointment, besides being a recognition of Father Aldo's human, moral and spiritual qualities, is also a great honor for our religious family and is a further confirmation of the "evident relevance" of our charism and an encouragement to continue our service in favor of persecuted Christians in the territories where so many of our brothers, because of faith in Christ, suffer violence and discrimination.

Dear Father Aldo, the Lord calls you to be the guide and shepherd of his flock, the dispenser of his mysteries, so that the faithful entrusted to your care may grow in grace through the celebration of the sacraments, and so

that they may know and live the paschal mystery, the foundation of our faith, a mystery from which you have decided to inspire your episcopal ministry, choosing as your episcopal motto the angel's announcement to the women who had rushed to the tomb on Easter morning: "Resurrexit, sicut dixit" (Mt 28:6). In thanking you for having served the Trinitarian charism with great passion, generosity, and courage in the many tasks you have performed, especially at the side of Christians who are refugees, persecuted, and discriminated against because of their faith in Christ, we wish you a fruitful apostolate at the service of the Church and the people of God, which is entrusted to you today through the Holy Father Francis. I thank you personally and on behalf of the General Council in particular for your last service as Vicar General of the Order and President of the Secretariat for Formation. We have shared these past three and a half years the responsibility of safeguarding the communion and fidelity of the Order and the Trinitarian Family to the charism of St John de Matha. On this festive day on which we remember, under the protection of St Agnes, the inspiration of our founder who started our religious family, we wish to entrust you to the protection of our Saints and Blesseds, and in particular the Virgin Mary, Mother of Good Remedy. Numerous and complex are the pastoral challenges that await you, but we are certain that you will be able to face them with determination, wisdom and fervent solicitude. Best wishes, Your Excellency dearest! May the Most Holy Trinity, the principle, model and ultimate goal of our life, protect you and fill you with His grace.



The appointment by Pope Francis was announced in the General Curia, in the Basilica of San Crisogono by the Minister General and simultaneously made known by the Bulletin of the Vatican Press Office.



The announcement was solemnly accepted in the Basilica of St. Chrysogonus at the end of a Eucharistic concelebration on the feast of the Order's Patroness Saint, St. Agnes, in the presence of a large Trinitarian Family gathered from Rome and beyond.

Bishop Aldo Berardi was born on 30 September 1963 in Longeville-lès-Metz (France). He is the seventh in a family of eight children. His family is originally from Bovino (FG) in Italy and emigrated to France in 1960. He lived his entire childhood in the town of Ars-sur-Moselle, Lorraine, where he was

baptized, confirmed, and received communion. He attended the town's schools including the Pilâtre-de-Rozier boarding school and participated in various associations.

He joined the Diocesan Vocational Service of the Metz Diocese in 1978 and then in 1979 at the Foyer-Seminaire St Louis in Montigny-lès-Metz while attending the Lycée Georges-de-la-Tour in Metz (1979-1982). After high school, he entered the Major Seminary of Villers-lès-Nancy for the first cycle of Philosophy (1982-1984). Having to do his military service, he chose cooperation (voluntary service replacing military service in France) and was assigned to Tsiroanomandidy in Madagascar for 2 years (1984-1986). Teaching French at the seminary and Catholic college, he got to know the Trinitarian missionaries, founders of this diocese. Their example was a motivation for his religious vocation. He then asked to join the Trinitarian Order and did his novitiate at Cerfroid, the Order's Mother House, with the first group sent by Fr General José Gamarra in 1986. After his first vows on 4 October 1987, he entered the Trinitarian Scholasticate in Montreal (Quebec, Canada) and attended the 2nd cycle of theology at the Montreal Major Seminary from 1987 to 1990. During his pastoral internship at the Italian parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in St. Leonard and at the Maison du Père for the homeless, he was initiated into the merciful-redemptive ministry proper to our charism.



From 1990 to 1992, he lived in the Spanish Trinitarian community in Rome, San Carlino, while attending the Licentiate course in Moral Theology at the Alphonsian Academy (Pontifical Lateran University). He made his solemn vows on 17 December 1990 in San Tommaso in Formis (Rome) and was ordained a deacon in San Carlino on 12 May 1991.



On 20 July 1991, he was ordained a priest in his city Ars-sur-Moselle (France) by the imposition of hands of Bishop Jean-Samuel Raobelina, MS, Bishop of Tsiroanomandidy.



In 1992, he received appointment for Cerfroid, where he followed the renovation work on the Mother House desired by the whole Order and became Minister. While in charge of the Trinitarian Centre in Cerfroid, he joined the pastoral work of the Soissons diocese as parish vicar, college chaplain and prison chaplain.



There he trained in psychiatry in Paris. He was elected to the Presbyteral Council.



It was at this time that work began on the restoration of the Cerfroid ruins, which, thanks to the zeal of various ministers, would lead to the beautiful result we have today.

In 1998, after the celebration of the centenary of the Order's approval, he left for Cairo (Egypt) and attended courses in Arabic and Islamology at Dar Comboni (1998-2000) in preparation for his departure for Sudan. He finally stayed in Cairo and with his Trinitarian brothers took care of the Saint Bakhita Centre for Sudanese refugees. From 2003, he will have the opportunity to visit Christian communities in difficulty in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2006, with the blessing of the General Council, he left Cairo for a pastoral experience in the Apostolic Vicariate of Arabia (2006-2010). In 2007, he resided in Bahrain as chaplain to the ethnic communities. In 2011, the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia was created.



In agreement with the Provincial Council of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Province, Fr. Aldo was appointed Episcopal Vicar for Arabia and Parish Priest of St. Areta and Companions Martyrs (2011-2019).



He then formed a Trinitarian community in the Middle East with confreres from different provinces, of which he was appointed Minister, and with his confreres organized pastoral activities at the service of Christians who are persecuted or limited in their religious expression. He was part of the Episcopal Council of Bishop Camillo Ballin, Apostolic Vicar.



He then undertakes a 3rd cycle of training in Practical Theology at Laval University in Quebec (Canada), which allows him an in-depth reflection on the practice and reality experienced in these difficult regions.

In May 2017, the French government appointed him “Chevalier de l’Ordre Nationale du Mérite” at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to reward his many years of service to Christian communities in need.

Elected several times as a member of the Provincial and General Chapters or designated as a translator, he has been able to get to know his Trinitarian brothers around the world. His command of languages allows him to have easy contact. He was elected Vicar General of the Order at the General Chapter celebrated in Rome in 2019 and appointed Head of the General Secretariat for Formation and Legal Representative of the General Curia.

With his appointment, the Holy Father recognizes the persistent work of the Order and the Trinitarian Family with poor and persecuted Christians. He thus honors our charism and our commitment.





## MESSAGE FROM BISHOP ALDO BERARDI TO THE TRINITARIAN FAMILY



On this day when Pope Francis appoints me Apostolic Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia (Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia), my thoughts go out to my Religious Family whom I wish to join in this happiness.

I thank the Holy Father for his trust and renew my vow of obedience. I accept this ministry with humility and fear, but confident in the presence of the Lord at my side and in his Spirit of strength guiding his Church. Becoming a successor to the Apostles seems beyond my reach and a responsibility beyond my possibilities. I can only immerse myself in prayer, Scripture and our living Tradition. It is Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the

Life (Jn 14:6). I count on your blessing and the support of the Christians entrusted to me, as well as on my Trinitarian family who will not fail to support me.

I remember with affection all Trinitarian men and women religious and the Trinitarian laity who participated in my formation, human and spiritual growth. I keep them in my heart as precious pearls of wisdom and tenderness.

I share this appointment with my formators, Trinitarian religious and diocesan priests, who have come across my path. They were the architects of my vocation, my vocational journey and my commitment as a Trinitarian religious and priest. They accompanied me in my discernment and encouraged me.

I share this appointment with my Trinitarian brothers from the different communities and provinces that I have met during these years of dialogue and fraternity. Together, we have built our community, worked for the redemption of the captives, and immersed ourselves in prayer in Trinitarian love. I mention with esteem my brothers of the General Vicariate Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom I owe so much. Their trust and support have been invaluable to me over the years. Cerfroid remains a point of reference for me, and the waters of the St Lawrence River always amaze my eyes.

I share this appointment with the Trinitarian nuns and women religious of different congregations who have opened my mind and heart to this tenderness of God for his people and to the demanding work well done. They represent this closeness that we need and that warms the heart.



I share this appointment with the Trinitarian laity and friends who have taught me the beauty of life, the joy of sharing and the necessary sacrifice that true love requires. Some are already in the bosom of the Father and will intercede even more for me and for our Trinitarian Family.

I share this appointment with my natural family, which has discreetly accompanied me with its affection in the freedom of my life choices.

I remain a member of this secular family that has given the Church so many saints and holy men and women who are inspirations on the path to the Trinity. It has given bishops in the distant and recent past such as Bishop Angel Martinez Vivas and Bishop Francis Vollaro. May their example be of fraternal help to me and may the Venerable Bishop Joseph Di Donna intercede for me! I greet our two Trinitarian Bishops, Bishop Antonio Scopelliti and Bishop Gustavo Bombin Espino, with whom I will share the grace of episcopal consecration.

I keep in my heart all these Trinitarian missionaries who have given their lives for the Gospel and the glory of the Trinity so that the men and women of this world may be free and live as children of light. They have drawn me closer to the Trinitarian religious life.

It is with regret that I leave the community of the General Curia, at the service of the Order and the Trinitarian Family, full of dynamism and creativity, guardian of the charism of Saint John de Matha. Receive my affection through the Rev. Father General.

I cherish all the young Trinitarians in formation whom I have had the joy and honor to serve. I have shared their questions and fears. May they discover the beauty of vocation, the joy of consecration, the power of the redemptive charism for the freedom of God's children and the love of the Trinity. I encourage their perseverance.

With Mary our Mother of Good Remedy and all our saints, I finally praise the Holy Trinity. May the Holy Trinity be adored, praised and loved because it is love for the liberation of our chained humanity.

I choose as my episcopal motto the proclamation of the Resurrection in Mt 28:6: "Resurrexit, sicut dixit". It is the risen Christ who takes us to the Father in the Spirit and makes us beloved sons and daughters of the Father. May He be Light in our lives!

Rome, 28 January 2023, feast of St Agnes, Patroness of the Trinitarian Order

Fr. Aldo Berardi, O.S.S.T.

Apostolic Vicar elected.

### **MESSAGE FROM TRINITARIAN INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY (SIT)**

Trinitarian International Solidarity congratulates the new Apostolic Vicar of North Arabia. Monsignor Aldo Berardi has distinguished himself, as a Trinitarian religious, to work constantly on behalf of Christians who suffer persecution because of their faith in Christ. This was his call and vocation. For the Trinitarians, especially the SIT, we are proud to see that the charism is so relevant that the whole Church recognizes our work and mission. Indeed, by appointing a Trinitarian bishop for an area where Christianity cannot be openly manifested, we confirm that the Holy Spirit wants the Trinitarian charism to remain alive and relevant. Congratulations Your Excellency, and congratulations to the Trinitarian Order.





## PRESENTATION OF THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NORTH ARABIA

The Apostolic Vicariate of North Arabia consists of four countries: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (2,179,890 km<sup>2</sup>). It was reconstituted in 2011 after the restructuring of the Vicariate of Kuwait and the Apostolic Vicariate of Arabia. It covers a population of 43 million, mostly Muslims, with 2.7 million Catholics (i.e., 6.3%) from all walks of life, rites, and languages. Arabic and English are the common languages. There are 11 parishes, 54 priests (11 diocesan and 43 religious: Capuchins, Salesians, Trinitarians, Religious of the Incarnate Word). There are 18 sisters of the Congregation of the Apostolic Carmelite (India) and the Sisters of the Rosary (Lebanon) who run two Catholic schools. The cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of Arabia in 2021 is in Bahrain and the co-cathedral dedicated to the Holy Family in 1961 in Kuwait. The patronal feast day is the 2nd ordinary Sunday, the Solemnity of Our Lady of Arabia. The Apostolic Nunciature has been in Kuwait since 1968. It also covers Qatar (2003) and Bahrain (2001).

### BAHREIN



It is a monarchy with an area of 759 km and a population of 1,324,000, 54% of whom are foreigners. The state religion is Islam. The country is ruled by the Sunni Khalifa dynasty, the king being His Majesty Shaykh Hamad bin 'Issa, bin Salman Al Khalifa. The discovery of oil in 1939 brought a large number of foreigners, mainly from South Asia.

Including foreigners, Muslims in Bahrain are 70%, Catholics 8.8%, Protestants 4.5%, Orthodox 1%, other Christians 2%. Among Muslims, 70% are Shia, 30% Sunni. About 100 Christians have obtained Bahraini nationality. There are tensions between Sunnis and Shias. The Bahraini Constitution does not forbid conversion from Islam to another religion. However, missionary activity in this direction is to be avoided because of the mainly social consequences that would result.

There are two parishes including the cathedral. The visit of Pope Francis in November 2022 marked a turning point in Islamic-Christian relations.



## KUWAIT



It is an emirate and has 3 million inhabitants, 2 million of whom are foreigners, over an area of 17,818 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Constitution declares that Islam is the State religion and that Shari'a is "the main source of legislation" (Article 2). Article 29 states: 'All are equal in human dignity, public rights and duties towards the law, without distinction of race, origin, language or religion'. Article 35 states: 'The State shall protect the exercise of religious practice in accordance with the greatest traditions, provided they do not affect public order and morals'.

The Emirate of Kuwait is ruled by the Sunni Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber-Al Sabah. Shiites make up about 30% of Kuwaiti Muslims.

Kuwaiti Christians number about 200, all Protestants except for a few Catholic families. Foreigners number about 450,000, of whom about 300,000 are Catholics. There are seven officially recognized churches: Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox.

There are four Catholic parishes and a great need for church building. But opposition from Muslim fundamentalists is fierce. The co-cathedral is built on land leased by the state.



## QATAR



It is an emirate with a population of 1,870,000 on an area of 11,607 km<sup>2</sup>. Foreigners make up 80% of the population. Christians make up 13.8%, of which 10.3% are Catholic, 2.7% Protestant and 0.8% Orthodox.

Article 1 of the 2004 Constitution states: Qatar is an independent Arab country. Islam is its religion and Sharia is the source of its legislation. The Emirate of Qatar follows an Islam according to the Wahhabi interpretation of Saudi Arabia. It is therefore impossible for a Qatari to renounce Islam, but the practice of non-Islamic religions is tolerated, especially by Christians, all of whom are foreigners.

There are about 250,000 Catholics.

In 2005, the government granted land to several Churches, placing them next to each other. The only Catholic parish of Our Lady of the Rosary was built in 2006. Recently, land was donated for a Maronite Church. None of these Churches have external Christian religious signs. We should build more Churches for Catholics, hoping that the State will give its consent.

For several years, a conference on interreligious dialogue has been held in Qatar. The director general of this conference said in 2014: 'We agree that these conflicts are not caused by the fact that we are Christians or Muslims, but by people who use religion in a negative way to provoke conflicts.'



## **SAUDI ARABIA**

It is a monarchy that covers 2,004,965 km and has a population of 28,083,000. Christians make up 4.4%: Catholics are about 1.5 million, or 3.8%, Protestants 0.4%, Orthodox 0.2%.

Wahhabi Islam is imposed by the ruling dynasty, the Saudis, and other faiths cannot have a place in Saudi Arabia's religious life. The kingdom has no constitution, the function of which is entrusted to the Koran. The Sunna, i.e., Islamic tradition, has a pre-eminent place in the formulation of the country's laws. Political, social and personal life is entirely governed by the prescriptions of the Sharia, Islamic law in its hanbali interpretation, the strictest of the four schools recognized by Sunni Islam.

Sunni Islam is the only permitted religion and no other worship is allowed. This creates enormous problems for Christians who cannot have places of worship. The reason given is that all Saudi Arabia is considered a large mosque, so no other religion can have a place of worship because it is not possible to build a non-Muslim temple inside a mosque. Similarly, a non-Muslim cannot be buried in Saudi Arabia because you can bury a non-Muslim in a mosque. However, the Covid crisis reduced this prohibition.

The previous king, 'Abdullah bin 'Abd el-'Aziz, allowed Christians to pray privately in their homes.

Lately, the powers of the religious police have been reduced: they can no longer arrest people caught in non-Islamic prayer, nor can they enter private homes.

Islamic proselytism is very active among foreigners living in Saudi Arabia. A Muslim who changes religion is in principle sentenced to death. The import of religious articles is banned, although there has been greater tolerance in recent years.

In 2016, the government made public for the first time its economic program, which has taken drastic measures that affect many foreign families forcing them to leave the country and will continue to alienate many families. There seems to be a plan for foreigners to leave by 2030. Uncertainty and precariousness are growing in the foreign community.

However, there is profound social and economic change under the crown prince's guidance. Arabia is now open for tourism and visas are easier to obtain. Major projects project Saudi Arabia into the future. Hopefully, this will also affect religious freedom.

We entrust our Christian brothers to your prayers and the Apostolic Vicariate to your intercession. May Our Lady of Arabia protect her children and may the local saints, St Areta, and his fellow martyrs of Najran as well as St. Isaac of Nineveh (originally from Qatar) answer their prayers.

*May the children of St John de Matha be  
guided by the Holy Spirit for the greater  
glory of the Holy Trinity!*

