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Pope Francis shakes hands with French President Emmanuel Macron during an audience at th

Pope Francis shakes hands with French President Emmanuel Macron during an audience at the Vatican Nov. 26, 2021. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

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In separate meetings with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and French President Emmanuel Macron, Pope Francis expressed his ongoing concern for the political and economic turmoil Lebanon is experiencing and his conviction that Lebanon has a special role to play in the Middle East.

Lebanon is "a message and also a promise that must be fought for," the pope said Nov. 25 during an audience with Mikati, who took office in September, ending a yearlong political stalemate in the country.

After a 20-minute private conversation with the Lebanese leader in the papal library, Pope Francis and Mikati moved into the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace for the presentation of gifts and the introduction of Mikati's large delegation.

The prime minister gave Pope Francis a brick from St. Savior Church, a Melkite Catholic church severely damaged by the massive explosion at the Beirut port in August 2020. The church, originally built in 1890, was about a half mile from the blast site and, like Lebanon as a whole, was left in tatters by the explosion.

The pope told the prime minister and his entourage that Lebanon has endured difficult moments and he assured the Lebanese people of his prayers and his commitment to helping rally support to get the country back on its feet, said Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office.

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The Gospel story of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter comes to mind, the pope told the delegation. Entering Jairus' house, where people are mourning the girl's death, Jesus takes her by the hand and tells her, "Get up."

"May God take Lebanon by the hand and tell it, 'Get up,'" the pope said.

Meeting Macron the next morning, the Vatican press office said, Lebanon was back on the agenda. The two countries have deep, longstanding ties, and Macron has pledged his government will work to rally the international community to help the nation recover.

A statement from Macron's office said that during their hourlong meeting, he and the pope "spoke at length about the case of Lebanon and the need to continue humanitarian aid while reaffirming the urgency of carrying out the necessary reforms in the country."