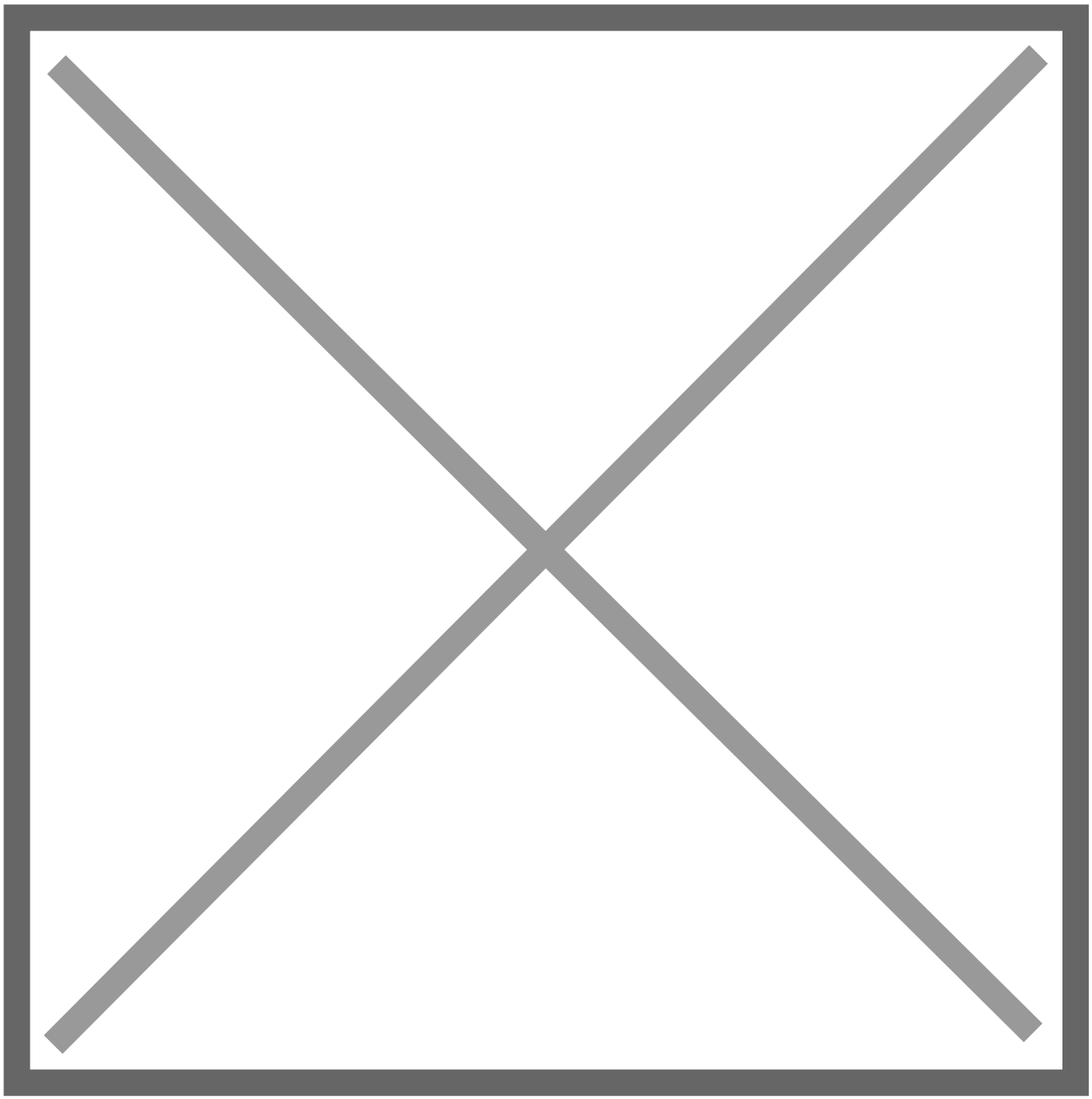
News



Smoke billows March 3, 2026, after an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran. (OSV News/Reuters/Mohamed Azakir)

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Beirut — April 13, 2026

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Lebanese Christians are reeling from the death and destruction wrought on their community, caught in the crossfire between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia, a side deadly conflict in the U.S. and Israel-Iran war.

So far, more than 2,000 people have been killed in Lebanon resulting from Israeli bombardments since the beginning of March, in a war that displaced more than 1 million people from their homes and caused widespread devastation and suffering.

Officials from Lebanon and Israel are to meet in Washington April 14 to discuss a ceasefire and peace, but Israel has ruled out a ceasefire with Hezbollah.

Lebanon's Maronite Catholic President Joseph Aoun, accused Israel of "perpetrating a new massacre" in defiance of efforts to restore regional stability and urged the U.S. and other nations to intervene. Israel told Christians and others displaced from southern Lebanon that they will not be able to return home until northern Israelis live in safety from Hezbollah attacks.

Israel also insists on excluding Lebanon from the U.S.-Iran two-week ceasefire, already imperiled by the failure to strike a peace deal.

Pope Leo XIV said that he's "closer than ever" to the "beloved Lebanese people in these days of pain, fear, and invincible hope in God," repeating his call for peace during his Regina Caeli address on April 12.

Lebanese Cardinal Bechara Rai, patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church, has rebuked both Hezbollah and Israel for the suffering inflicted on Lebanon. "The country is going through a critical situation due to Iranian interference through Hezbollah and Israeli aggression," he said in his Easter homily. "Our hearts bleed for the victims of the conflict imposed on Lebanon."

"Together, we raise this prayer, asking the Lord to protect Lebanon," Rai urged Catholics prior to April 11's peace vigil at the Vatican, with Catholics joining Pope Leo in prayer throughout the world.

Christians make up about a third of Lebanon's population of roughly 5.5 million people. With 12 Christian sects, the country is home to the largest proportion of Christians of any nation in the Arab world.

Lebanon experienced one of its bloodiest days on April 8, shortly after Easter. Israel dropped 160 bombs on 100 targets within 10 minutes, without warning. Beirut was rocked with simultaneous explosions, with at least 350 people reportedly killed and many more wounded in the Lebanese capital alone.

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"It was a big surprise for us and all of Lebanon seeing central Beirut hit so hard. This came completely unexpectedly, without any warning," Michel Constantin told OSV News.

"These areas, like the American University of Beirut, Raouche, Manara, have nothing to do with Hezbollah. People were killed in east Beirut and near Broumana," a picturesque village east of the city, said Constantin, who is the regional director for the Catholic Near East Welfare Agency-Pontifical Mission in Lebanon and Syria.

CNEWA Pontifical Mission has been at the forefront of providing humanitarian aid to Lebanese in the south and Beirut.

Constantin said Christians are shocked by members of their community who have nothing to do with Hezbollah being killed in the Israeli onslaught.

"A politician, close to the Lebanese Forces (a Christian political party strongly opposed to Hezbollah), was hit with big rockets. He died instantly," Constantin said

of Pierre Moawad, who with his wife, Flavia, and a friend, were killed in an Israeli bombing on Easter in Ain Saadeh, east of Beirut. The area is far from those Israel is normally attacking. Israel said these people were not directly targeted.

"It was scary, it caused anger, it caused sadness. You feel you are being dehumanized. We are not fine," said Marielle Boutros, a Beirut-based project coordinator for the papal charity Aid to the Church in Need. "We are surviving, but in the heart of each one of us, we want this nightmare to end in some way."

The deadly strikes are creating a climate of fear and instability for Christians and Lebanon's other religious communities as Israel and Hezbollah embroil the country — already steeped in a disastrous financial crisis since 2019 — in the war. Lebanese worry the tensions could spill into widespread sectarian strife and reignite a possible civil war.

"Towns and villages in which Christians live in south Lebanon have also been violently attacked without any warning. Israel has bombed areas that have nothing to do with Hezbollah," CNEWA's Constantin said of the region requiring desperate aid.

"A tragic incident involved a father, Georges Soueid, and his son Elie, who tried to bring bread for their entire Christian village of Dibil when they were killed by Israeli gunfire," Constantin told OSV News. "Their vehicle had been full of bread when they were shot dead."

Inhabitants in several Christian villages in the south have refused Israeli evacuation orders to leave their homes, fearing a Hezbollah takeover or Israeli destruction.

However, Israel has bombed most of the bridges linking the south to the rest of Lebanon; thus, isolating communities now badly in need of basic foodstuffs, medicines and other humanitarian aid, according to CNEWA and Human Rights Watch.

"The papal nuncio Archbishop Paolo Borgia has visited many of the villages," Constantin said. "And Catholic priests are managing to go to the villages to minister to the people, celebrating Mass," despite the danger, he said.

Lebanese Maronite parish priest in Rmeich, Fr. Toni Elias told OSV News that he and the faithful now "100-percent sense Jesus' presence and support" as they daily pray

together. "Otherwise, how could we manage to remain here," he said of Rmeich, the last village in Lebanon's south on the border with Israel.

"We are facing bombardments and various attacks on the village, but still, we have hope as we celebrate the Mass daily and recite the rosary together. It's the life of prayer and our faith that sustains (us)," the priest said.

Constantin said CNEWA cares for 430 Maronite Catholic families in Debel, 425 Christian families in Ain Ebel and 1,400 Maronite Catholic families in Rmeich. But aid convoys the agency tried to send both before and after Easter did not receive permission for safe passage.

"We are trying again this week," he said.

This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.