

HOPE AND ONLY HOPE!

June 2017

Dear Friends and Partners in the service of Christ,

Greetings and every blessing from above!

Some of you have received my Easter letter that sounded hopeless even in the season of hope. I have weakened by so many depressing events around Easter. To watch the children suffocating, and the elderly lying helpless, and hear the news of the missiles striking an airport in Syria by order of Mr. Trump, plus other painful stories, were all the source of hopelessness.

I was wrong to surrender to the lack of hope!! As the Resurrection of Christ is the source of hope today, tomorrow and for eternity.

And a sign of hope is seen even in the eyes of the refugee children. Their happily laughing and playing give the heart a ray of light.





Another striking sign is what you see in Homs in the Presbyterian Church and School. They have called their project: A Space for Hope.

A Space for Hope was initiated by a team of Church youth in 2014. Wanting to reinforce the spirit of cooperation between youth from the different parts of the Syrian Society as the way to achieve meaning for life together, in the face of tragic situations!



They began with youth, ages 12-18 from the different backgrounds, religiously, politically and socially, getting them to participate in sport activities, and other team works, such handcrafts.

In less than a year the team counted 186 males and females who worked as belonging to each other's.

Space for hope became known, and another team began in Al-Hafar, not far from Homs. There they also began to light Candles of hope in the hearts and minds of 120 children of the town.

"We want to increase our cooperation and team work in sport and other craft programs so to prove to all that our variety in the Syrian society is our wealth and pride. We together are able to build the future for Syria".

I am informed by Pastor, Mufeed that they will work hard to involve parents of the children and youth and together find more ways to cooperate.

These are not the only signs of hope even in what seems to be a hopeless situation, especially in Homs, a city that was hit badly.

The Presbyterian sanctuary that was early hit among the many other ancient Churches, and was out of use for few years, is now back in full ministry. Many thanks to all partners who God has used to bring back the Sanctuary- a place for worship, youth activities, children teaching, and women's projects- A place of service and witness.

As the city suffered much, many of our congregation families lost their homes, and became displaced. Yet now at least about forty of those families are back in their renovated homes.

Praise God for the help of the Presbyterian Disaster Agency, the Outreach Foundation, and other partners who have been agents in the hand of God to bring hope back to many of those families.



The Churches in Fairouzen, not far from Homs, host many displaced families and tries to provide for their spiritual as well as material needs with love and care. Pastor, Yacoub Sabbagh, is committed to help make the church a community of love and hospitality.



Both Churches were visited by a group of six leaders from the Presbyterian Church USA who have helped renovate many homes and continue to do so until all those families are back in their own homes. This visit was deeply appreciated by the whole congregations. PCUSA is a Church on whom we depend much and for whom we praise God.

CHURCHES IN THE NORTH EAST OF SYRIA:

Presbyterian Churches in Qamishly, Hassakeh, and Malkieh, can only be described as Churches of faithfulness and courage!

North East Syria, is a far area, and has witnessed waves of violence for several years, and many of the citizens have left to emigration or to displacement internally, the remnant churches maintain a presence with a witness:

Qamishly:

An old Church holds worship services, Sunday morning, and Sunday evening. Its elders are committed to stay and work hard so that the church serves and show a witnessing spirit. Its women's group reaches out to other

women, help by raising funds through Bazzars to help the poor, and develop the ability of women doing crafts to sell and help their families. While the church has few children yet holds a Sunday school to serve children from other churches, teach bible stories, hymns and other activities and always have a number of children over 60/70 .



Malkieh: Another old Presbyterian Church, who has lost its pastor to emigration due to the violence in the area several years ago. Like Qamishly is so proud of its tradition of being a church of the Reformation.

Rev. Firas Farah, basically pastor of Qamishly has become also pastor of Malkieh, serves both churches with love and enthusiasm.



Hassakeh: A major city with another Presbyterian church, which at the present is being served by a woman preacher recently graduated from the Near East School of Theology. Mathild Sabbagh.

Mathild is a daughter of the Church known and loved and appreciated by all. Works closely with Rev. Firas who is also the pastor in charge.

In the three Churches one recognizes how lively in faith and spirit those communities are, despite every reason to feel discouraged, as each congregation has lost to emigration many of their members.

One very special phenomenon is clear in the three cities, that is of an ecumenical spirit.

As the area traditionally has all the variety of the Christian Traditions present for centuries, more than ever before the cooperation and the

fellowship among all has been an aim of all. “We Christians have to stick together so to have a unified witness and service. We want to stay in this land which is ours and here we live our faith.

Recently all three Churches have been visited by a group of Presbyterians from the USA-a group of the Syria/Lebanon Partnership Network. A group that want to show solidarity with the Syrian Churches and all the Syrian people. And are committed to Pray for peace and for an end to this human tragedy, they also try to partner with the church in responding to the needs of many.

The group had the opportunity, to meet the Presbyterian congregations, worship with them, and meet many leaders from other churches, listen to the struggle of all the people, who also expressed appreciation for the visit which shows the spirit of the unity of the Body of Christ-the Church.



The Narous Camp:

During visiting Malkieh, the group visited the camp of the Izidies who ran away from the violence of ISIS both from Iraqi and Syrian areas.

After listening to one of the leaders and heard from a woman, about the suffering inflicted on their people, and expressing gratitude to the church who was first to extend its hand to welcome and provide help. The Church was able to have a well in the camp to provide the needed water...That was through the great help from the Outreach Foundation!

An old man joined the group and asked to have the chance to tell of seven stories and pleaded that those stories be told and published whenever possible.

As I was translating to the group I broke out with tears, and the man was asked to make it short.

In honor of that old man I ask forgiveness that I will tell in short what I still remember:

1. A group of mothers and grandmothers had to witness killing of their children gather the blood in a basin and were made to drink the blood. HURRFYING!!!!
2. Our girls, 8 years old are raped to death.
3. A group of our women, 16-18 year of age hanged themselves so not to fall into the hand of ISIS.
4. A child of 8 month old in his mother's lap was asked by ISIS man to tell where he came from. When he did not answer, he was hanged.

As I was unable to hear any more the man was made to stop.

The last comment was that this is the 70th time in their history the Izides had suffered attempts to be destroyed.

Please accept my apology for writing these horrifying stories, I did it first in honor of that old man, and second so that the world knows what the

Syrian and Iraqi people in several areas have suffered.... areas run and controlled by ISIS.

From Qamishly the group flew to Damascus, visiting the Presbyterian Church there.

While Damascus, has been mainly under the Government control it has received countless shells and rockets from the areas controlled by the fighter around it. Most especially the Christian areas of Old Damascus. The Presbyterian Church was directly hit as many others.

Thanks be to God, and to many of our faithful partners, the Church has been renovated and the congregation is as lively as ever, the women and the youth, and the children all enjoy worship and fellowship. Rev. Peter Zaour, has worked hard to bring back life to the church and make it an agent of service. Praise be to God.

From NESSL and all the visited congregations, deep gratitude!

We realize that those visits are costly and consume time and energy, and all are signs of Love and concern! Many Thanks.

Continuing NESSL Relief projects:

Indeed the Church and its people make one significant Sign of hope as it continues to respond to the cries of the afflicted. And despite the continuing acts of violence in many areas of Syria, the church wherever is found it lights candles of hope.

NESSL, in fact, ever since 2012 has not denied providing for the displaced and made refugees. Its general relief work, winter project, and in every other ways reach out to the needy not only our own members, rather also every seeker of help is being responded to.

NESSL's education of refugee children gains good reputation in the camps in Lebanon and more people keep asking for their children to be included. Older children who were able to go to some government schools for the sake of official papers, as soon as those schools are over they come back to us, even for our summer months.



We continue to educate just below 400 children providing all their needs of school material, medical checkup, one meal a day....

Now we are in the month of Ramadan fast, we are concerned about some children who are made to fast while the summer heat is on the increase.

On the other hand NESSL has extended help to many students in Syrian Schools so to be able to get school needs.

But also our five major schools in Lebanon that serves over six thousands of Lebanese and some hundred Syrian children continue to need support in order to provide the needed and requested help with fees.

Many thanks to all partners who have helped us carry on this needed ministry.

However, with the continuing need for NESSL to carry on the normal relief projects, we continue to appeal for our partners to keep supporting those projects.

Without your faithful supports we will not be able to continue.

PLEASE PLEASE CONTINUE YOUR PRAYERS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

In Christ. Mary Mikhael