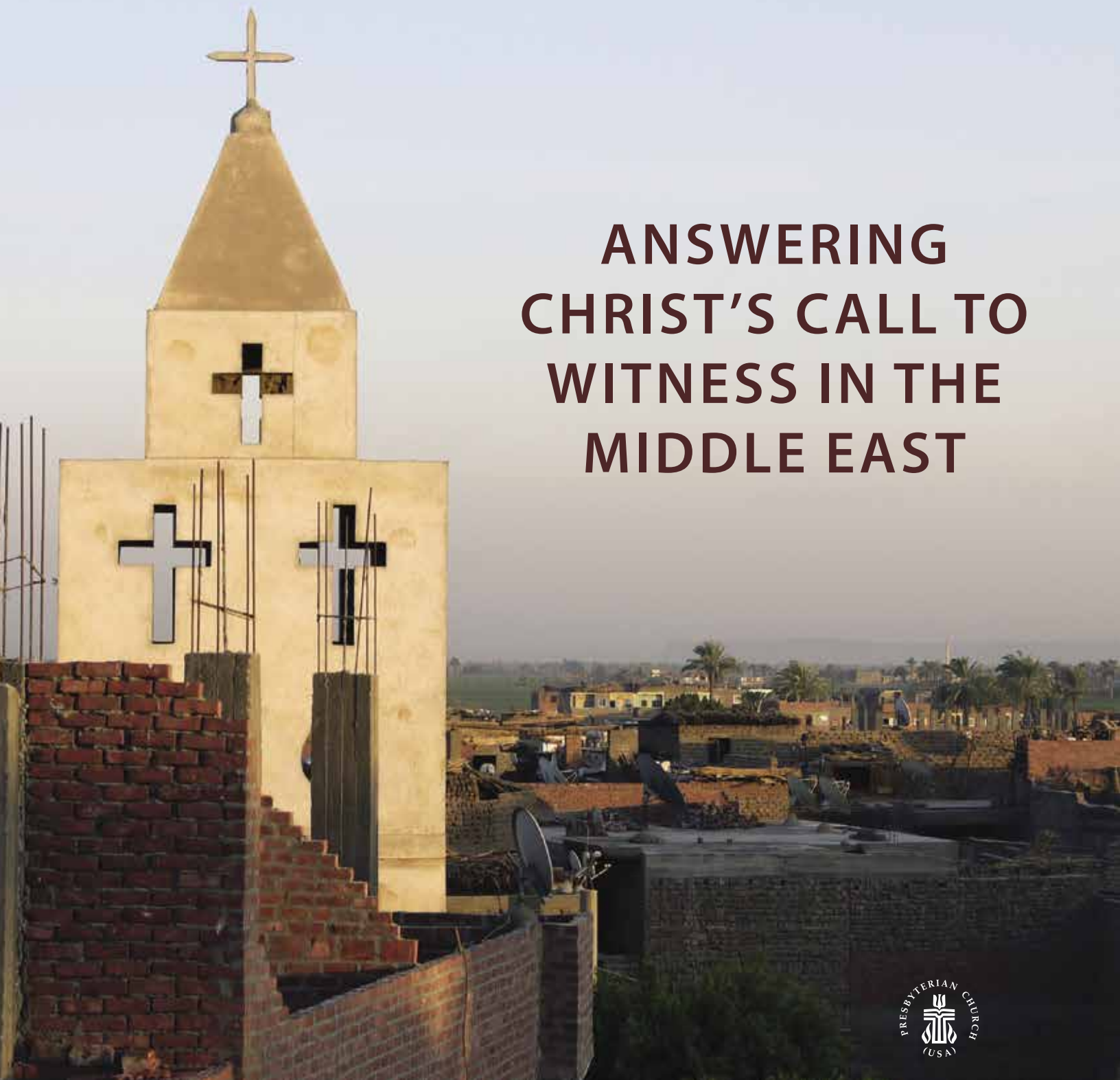


mission crossroads

ANSWERING CHRIST'S CALL TO WITNESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST





Seeing the Middle East through Christ's call

As reports of turmoil and conflict in the Middle East continue to make news headlines, Western governments continue to deliberate and strategize how to protect their national interests in the region.

On the other hand, the church's outlook and response to events in the world is diametrically different. Compelled by the love of God, the church responds to Christ's call – "you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Christians in the Middle East have, in fact, been Christ's witnesses since the Day of Pentecost. Successive generations of Christ's followers proclaimed the Gospel to the region's inhabitants for the past two millennia. However, since the dawn of Islam in the seventh century, Christians gradually became a small minority. By the beginning of the 19th century, Orthodox, Assyrian, Maronite, and Eastern Catholic churches that trace their origin to the Apostolic Era were in a state of decline.

Presbyterian churches in the US and Scotland heard God's call to send missionaries to strengthen indigenous churches in the land where Christianity had its cradle. In 1819, a small group of Presbyterian missionaries set foot in Syria (then part of the Ottoman Empire). Since then, several hundred Presbyterian mission workers were sent to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and other countries in the region. In the same period, Anglican and Lutheran missionaries flocked to Palestine (present-day Israel and Palestinian Territories).

After centuries of oppressive Ottoman rule, the first missionaries faced pressing needs for education and health care. So they established clinics, hospitals, and schools, including the first schools for girls. They founded a number of universities throughout the region, and started seminaries to train pastors. A new translation of the Bible into the Arabic language was completed and published widely. In time, Presbyterian communities were formed; churches were planted, and eventually organized into presbyteries and synods. The missionaries' loving services earned them the respect and admiration of the region's population.

For the first few decades, Presbyterian missionaries named their posts "American Mission," and exported some cultural values and norms along with the Gospel. But, as the missionary movement matured, Presbyterians came to understand "Mission" to be God's work, and therefore, we are called to do mission in partnership with all members of the Body of Christ.¹

Today, partnership missiology guides all activities of Presbyterian World Mission in the Middle East. Mission co-workers are sent at the invitation of partner churches, to come alongside and co-labor with Middle East Christian partners.

While Western powers strategize about how to protect their interests in the Middle East, Christ calls his church to have a different mindset: "look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting" (John 4:35).

The unprecedented events of what started in 2011 as the "Arab Spring" now pose new challenges and opportunities for the church to model the Kingdom of God in this region in turmoil. Many Middle Eastern churches are responding proactively to the changes in their countries with ministries of compassion, outreach, and discipleship. In this issue of Mission Crossroads, you will read about some of these initiatives; about how God's mission in the Middle East is being fulfilled among those who are captive or in the shadow of death, those threatened by violence and poverty. You will read how the good news of the gospel is changing lives.

Mission Crossroads is a Presbyterian Mission Agency publication about the church's mission around the world.

Presbyterian World Mission is committed to sending mission personnel, empowering the global church, and equipping the Presbyterian Church (USA.) for mission as together we address the root causes of poverty, work for reconciliation amidst cultures of violence, and share the good news of God's saving love through Jesus Christ.

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Presbyterian World Mission
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ON THE COVER: Willem J. de Wit took this photo of a church in an Egyptian village.

1. "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership," 2003 policy statement adopted by the 215th General Assembly

Bible societies celebrate 150th anniversary of the Van Dyck Bible

By Kathy Melvin

In 2015, Bible societies across the Middle East are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the most widely used Arabic translation of the Scriptures. The impact this translation cannot be overestimated. Since its completion in 1865, more than 50 million copies of the Van Dyck Bible have been printed and distributed.

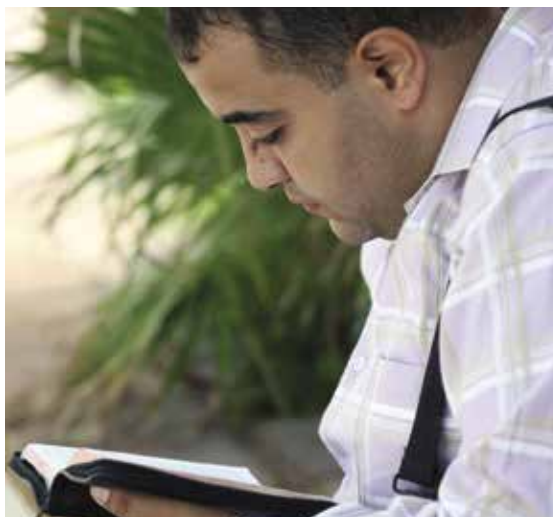
Hunter Farrell, director of World Mission, was a special guest at the 150th anniversary celebration in Cairo and spoke of the unique partnership that brought the complete translation of the Bible to the Arabic-speaking world.

Commonly known as the Van Dyck Bible, the work was a partnership of several individuals and Middle Eastern churches, who worked 17 years to give birth to the most important Arabic translation in modern history.

In the 19th century, Presbyterian missionaries arrived in Beirut but quickly found that Arabic translations of the Bible were scarce and dated. Rev. Eli Smith, a Presbyterian missionary, worked with Butrus al-Bustani, on translating the entire Bible.

Smith died in 1857 before the project was complete. Presbyterian missionary, Cornelius Van Dyck, M.D., for whom the translation is named, took over coordination of the project. The Arabic New Testament was finished in 1860 and the Old Testament translation, which took another five years, was finally printed in 1865.

In Beirut, in 1865, prominent Orthodox priest Ghubreen Jebara was quoted as saying: "But for the American missionaries, the Word of God had



A young man reads an Arabic Bible, commonly known as the Van Dyck Bible translation.

well-nigh perished out of the [Arabic] language; but now, through the labors of Dr. Eli Smith and Dr. Van Dyck, they have given us a translation so pure, so exact, so clear, and so classical, as to be acceptable to all classes and all sections."

A century and a half later, the Bible Society of Egypt, the largest Arabic Bible publishing operation in the world, has the goal of making the Bible "available to all, understandable to all and affordable to all" and freely distributes copies of the Van Dyck Bible to refugees, the disabled, and prisoners and their families.

Farrell closed his remarks at the celebration with Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

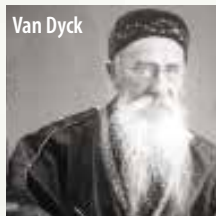
Presbyterian Mission in SYRIA & LEBANON

1823 The first Presbyterian mission personnel arrive in greater Syria (then part of the Ottoman Empire). They focus on establishing schools for boys and girls, doing medical work, and organizing churches.

1834 Rev. Eli Smith (1801-1857) brings the first printing press with Arabic script to Syria. This press became a major factor in increasing literacy and literature in the Arabic language. In 1847, he

collaborates with Syrian scholars Butrus al-Bustani and Nasif el Yazigi on translating the Bible into contemporary Arabic. Smith dies in 1857 and is succeeded by Rev.

Cornelius Van Dyck in coordinating the project. By 1865, the translation is completed. The "Van Dyck Translation" continues to be used by most Arabic Christians in the Middle East today.



1834 Mrs. Smith opens the Beirut Evangelical School for Girls. It is the first girls' school in the entire Ottoman Empire. By 1837, 600 students are enrolled in 13 schools in Syria and Lebanon, 120 of whom are girls. By 1890, 1,500 children are enrolled in Protestant Schools, of whom 7,000 are girls.

1848 First Evangelical Church is organized in Beirut followed by churches in Hasbaya (1852), Aleppo (1853), and Homs. By 1870 three Presbyteries are formed.

Faithful response of the church to the conflict in Syria

By Hadi Ghantous

Throughout history, the Middle East has seen a great deal of instability caused by power struggles between empires, as well as conflicts among its peoples.

In the last four years, Christians in Syria, and to a lesser extent Christians in Lebanon, have suffered greatly because of the great crisis that began in March 2011. Although all the inhabitants of Syria are suffering because of this great crisis, Christians face more difficulties and challenges simply because they are a minority. That threat is even more intense for the Protestant community because it is a minority within a minority.

Thus, Protestants in Syria have been facing different challenges, including threat of death, loss of beloved, loss of homes, displacement, emigration, exile, loss of jobs, loss of educational facilities, financial difficulties, loss of basic needs, the damage of many church building and activities, the feeling that they are caught between warring giants and ultimately, a loss of vision and of hope. In fact, the challenges facing the Protestant community in Syria and Lebanon today may be the greatest since its founding in the 19th century.

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) has responded to those challenges through a variety of programs and actions, including providing financial support and baskets of food and hygiene products, offering rent and school support, medical care, fuel, electricity, and drinking water. NESSL has provided spiritual and pastoral care, as well as rebuilding church facilities, establishing new worship centers.

Among the most significant challenges facing NESSL today is maintaining its identity and its

.....

the challenges facing the Protestant community in Syria and Lebanon today may be the greatest since its founding in the 19th century.

.....

presence. How can we maintain an influential presence in such chaos and after such a great loss of members? How do we face all this hatred, violence, and death? How to be faithful to its identity and call as a church in the midst of all that? And what will our churches look like when the crisis is over?

It is precisely in these circumstances that NESSL and all churches in the Middle East must:

- Realize at all times that carrying the cross is an inseparable part of its life and identity, and be mindful that the cross is the way to the resurrection.
- Remember that passing through difficult times has always been part of the life of the church in the Middle East, yet the church has survived and is still active.
- Realize that it is called not just to survive, but to be present and effective. Mere survival will mean a slow death, but giving its life for the sake of others is the very purpose of the Church (John 12:24-25).
- Remember its calling to look beyond its own needs and to freely carry God's love to the poor and marginalized.
- Be prophetic in the midst of the crisis,

1866 Presbyterians found the school that eventually bears the name American University in Beirut (AUB). Today AUB is considered the premiere university of Lebanon.

At a ceremony marking the laying of the cornerstone of

the first building on campus, founding president Daniel

Bliss declared that, after studying at the college, a student might "go out believing in one God, in many gods, or in no God. But it will be impossible for anyone to continue

Presbyterian Church in Damascus



with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief."

1869 A theological seminary is founded in Abeih with Dr. Calhoun, Dr. Eddy, and Dr. Jessup as faculty. The seminary moves to Beirut in 1873, and becomes the Near East School of Theology in 1932.

1893 Dr. Mary Pierson Eddy begins to work with tuberculosis patients and lays the groundwork for Hamlin hospital.

1917 Britain declares its support of "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (Balfour Declaration). Tension between the Christian and Muslim communities erupts. In 1948, most Western governments recognize Israel as a sovereign state. Presbyterian missionaries question the decision as unjust for the native inhabitants of Palestine.

1918 WWI ends. Ottoman Empire is dismantled. French and British colonial occupation begins.

remembering that we are called to live by the principles and values of the Kingdom of God.

- Remember that fear is the most dangerous enemy and the opposite of faith (Josh. 1:9), and to face each crisis with faith and hope.
- Condemn all types of violence and face fanaticism and death with love, liberation, justice, peace, and hope.

Finally, the church in the Middle East is called to remember that we believe in the God who opens a way in the midst of the “Sea of the End”

(Exod. 13:17-14:31), leading his people through the valley of death, on the face of Sheol, to a new life. Thus, the church is called to be true prophets of peace and hope, resisting all kinds of violence and ‘buying fields in the time of wars and even while in prison’ (Jer. 21:3-5; 32:1-15). It’s only by laying down its life that the church in the Middle East can truly be the church of Jesus Christ.

Hadi Ghantous is the pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Minyara, Lebanon.



With assistance from The Outreach Foundation, the Presbyterian Church in Kamishli, Syria, drilled a well to provide water for 1,500 Yazidi families who had been driven from their homes in northern Iraq by ISIL militants in the summer of 2014. In this photo, Rev. Feras Ferah (left) and one of the elders of the church oversee the completion of the project to provide water to refugees.

1926 The American Junior College is opened

in order to provide a college education to graduates from the American School for Girls. This junior college later becomes the Lebanese American University.

Mission school & printing press, Beirut, 1871



1948 US government recognizes the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine.

Presbyterian missionaries question the decision as unjust for the indigenous population of Palestine, and protest the US government’s action.

1959 The Presbyterian Church – USA transfers full responsibility

for the spiritual, educational, medical, social, and administrative ministries of the churches to the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL).

1967 Israel attacks Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Missionaries are suspected of siding with Israel, and are evacuated for their safety, but return in fewer numbers a year later.

1974 Inauguration of the Middle East Council of Churches, which represents about 12 million Christians in the Middle East, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches.

1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War results in the migration of many Christians and the departure of most missionaries. A few of the Presbyterian congregations close.

‘Greater love has no one than this’: Kayla Mueller remembered

PC(USA) mourns the death of partner-in-ministry Kayla Mueller, Christian mission volunteer held hostage by the Islamic State.

By Scott O'Neill



Kayla Mueller

“For as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be normal, something we just accept,” said Kayla Mueller, a kidnapped Christian aid worker describing her work with Syrian refugees in 2013.

“I find God,” she later said to her family, “in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how you [God] are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek you.” Gregory Allen-Pickett, general manager of Presbyterian World Mission, first connected with the young activist in May 2009.

“I was working in Guatemala with a nonprofit called Healing Waters. We worked with local communities to establish a source of safe drinking water, and Kayla’s campus ministry group was there at the same time,” recalls Allen-Pickett. “Kayla stood out to me as particularly thoughtful and articulate. Her questions and comments showed a deeper level of commitment and thought regarding the issues that surrounded her on the trip.”

Mueller began her volunteer service efforts in middle school, volunteering for local Kiwanis Club events and homeless shelters.

In high school she organized a protest to raise awareness about the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. As a senior in 2007, she received the gold President’s Volunteer Service Award for her work with Americorps and Big Brothers Big Sisters, among many other groups.

In December 2012 Mueller traveled to the Turkey-Syria border to provide aid to Syrian refugees through the Danish Refugee Council. She was passionate about helping the refugees and raising awareness about the crisis unfolding before her. “Anger, sadness, and fear,” she wrote in her blog at the time, “are the best composts for compassion.”

On August 3, 2013, Mueller and a friend visited a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Aleppo, Syria, to repair the hospital’s Internet connection. She and her companion stayed there overnight and were reportedly taken captive the next day on their way to the bus station.

It was spring 2014 before anyone would hear from her again—in the form of a letter she sent out through fellow captors who had been released. On February 10, 2015, Mueller’s family received information of her death directly from the terrorist group known as the Islamic State, a fact later confirmed by the US State Department.

My hope is that Kayla inspires others to alleviate suffering in the world and in their own communities.”

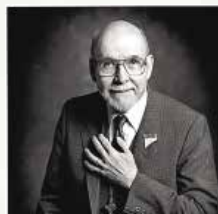
Mueller’s parents have started a foundation called Kaylashands.org. To read what Mueller’s friends have to say about her, visit forkayla.org.

2000 At the beginning of the 21st century, there are around 14,000 students studying in 20 schools run by NESSL. Students come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds (Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and others).

2003 US-led military invasion of Iraq disrupts balance of power in the region, enflames Islamic militancy, and leads to increased persecution of Christians. Turmoil spreads to neighboring countries, resulting in millions of refugees and exodus of indigenous Christians from their

homelands. Presbyterian World Mission partners with Syrian and Iraqi churches to provide relief.

Ben Weir (left) & Kenneth Bailey (right) served in Lebanon during the civil war.



Today PC(USA) personnel serve in active partnership alongside Middle Eastern Christians to give witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ throughout the region.



An Invitation

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For your convenience, we are providing a few simple options for you to use in submitting your gifts. Congregations can send contributions through regular receiving channels, usually presbyteries, or send Directed Mission Support gifts directly to the address below. Those gifts designated to Directed Mission Support (DMS) accounts will be reported to the presbytery. We urge you to report DMS contributions directly to your presbytery in order to keep them informed of your denominational support.

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Presbyterians' commitment to education continues to flourish in the Middle East

By Victor E. Makari

Since the mid-19th century, educational institutions established by pioneering Presbyterians and their Congregational and Reformed cousins have spread Christian values and equipped national leaders in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and other Gulf states. Recent national movements for liberation, democratizations and civic engagement in the Arab world offer some of the most dramatic bits of evidence that the Presbyterian Church's commitment to education is continuing to bear fruit around the world.

Daniel Bliss, a missionary of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, served as president of the American University of Beirut when it was founded as The Syrian Protestant College in 1866. At a ceremony marking the laying of the cornerstone of the first building on campus, Bliss pledged that the school would welcome students "without regard to color, nationality, race or religion." After studying at the college, he declared, a student might "go out believing in one God, in many gods, or in no God. But it will be impossible for anyone to continue with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief."

Students at Ramses School for Girls in Cairo, 2013



Photo courtesy of Jan DeVries

Cornerstone of mission

In just two decades, missionaries serving in Egypt launched 187 elementary and secondary schools in villages where there were no educational institutions. Presbyterian mission work in the region began in Syria in 1823 and in Iran in 1834. Thomas McCague and James Bennett, the first Presbyterian missionaries to arrive in Egypt, described the work they began in 1854 as having been "the means of saving many souls, gathering many companies of believers, establishing many schools, diffusing secular as well as religious knowledge far and wide, giving the nation a start on the road to enlightenment and freedom."

That commitment inspired Egyptian congregations and wealthy national Christians to fund additional schools. Missionaries founded the first schools for girls in the Ottoman Empire that are now educating women through graduate and postgraduate levels. They built academies that provided training in the humanities, arts, and sciences, raising the bar in higher education in the region. In addition to the American University of Beirut, other colleges founded and initially headed by American Protestant missionaries included the American University in Cairo (founded 1919), the Lebanese American University (founded 1924) and Haigazian University in Beirut (founded 1955).

Missionaries established two highly influential theological seminaries: the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, started by Presbyterians in 1863, and the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, founded by Presbyterians and Congregationalists in 1932. Over the years, both have produced church leaders for most Protestant and some Orthodox denominations in the Middle East as well as in Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, and the Americas.

It was also missionaries that assisted Middle Eastern partner churches and organizations in launching literacy campaigns in remote villages. Some of these efforts have evolved into broad-spectrum Christian social service and sustainable development organizations. A prime example is the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (better known now by its acronym CEOSS), which has become a leader in training other national and regional development agencies while serving no less than two million Egyptians at any one moment.

Graduates of Presbyterian-founded schools



*Students and teachers
at the mission school in
Aleppo Syria, ca. 1960*

and universities in the Middle East have made significant contributions in education, religion, art, literature, science, medicine, and diplomacy.

Most early missionaries went to the Middle East for the long haul, dedicating an entire career or lifetime to their calling. Extended daily contact with the Arab people gave mission educators a deep understanding of their history, culture, customs, politics, religions, attitudes, and aspirations.

Presbyterian missionaries and Arab Americans educated in mission schools were among the first to raise concerns about the bloodshed likely to result from efforts to create a homeland for displaced Jewish people after World War II. Among those advocating a solution that would avoid the partitioning of Palestine, and maintain strong Arab relations with the United States, was longtime Presbyterian missionary John S. Badeau, president of the American University in Cairo, who went on to serve as US ambassador to Egypt in the early 1960s.

The creation of the previously “state” of Israel was only one of a series of upheavals affecting mission work in the Middle East in the mid-20th century. Others included the end of French and British occupation of Lebanon and Syria and several ensuing wars, a military-led revolution in Egypt, and growing Arab nationalism. Many mission-operated village schools in Egypt were closed because of new government regulations. Financial difficulties and other issues led US mission boards to transfer universities they had founded

and operated, including their valuable property, to the administration of independent, autonomous, and self-perpetuating boards. Without church representation on their boards, most of those universities became secular institutions, although some have retained the values that inspired their original vision.

The outcome was different for elementary and secondary schools. Instead of being nationalized, as were so many other foreign-controlled institutions, these schools remained private under church oversight, with leadership transferred from the American church to its overseas partners. Other new schools were added by the national churches. Today, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon operates several schools in those two countries, and the Synod of the Nile manages 25 schools in Egypt. With student bodies representative of their nations’ entire populations, these schools provide distinctive quality education under competent national Christian leaders. They are modeling best practices in teaching, learning, and leadership and producing graduates equipped to pursue the goals of enlightenment and freedom.

Victor E. Makari is a graduate of Assiut College and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, both founded by Presbyterian missionaries. He is a mission co-worker and also served as coordinator of the Middle East office of the Presbyterian Church (USA.)’s Presbyterian Mission Agency from 1990 until 2010.

Middle Eastern Christians call us to deeper partnership

By Terri Bate



Two cemeteries in Egypt are the final resting places for Presbyterian missionaries who dedicated their lives to spreading the gospel in that country. One is in the capital city of Cairo and the other is in Assiut, a city on the edge of the desert about six hours by train from Cairo. The graves are well cared for by members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt as an ongoing show of respect for the contributions of their spiritual forebears.

The gospel these missionaries shared and the church they nurtured live on. In this season of Eastertide, we look to Christ's resurrection as a powerful reminder that God's love will never perish: it will always offer us hope and the promise of new life. As the apostle Paul says, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

I am impressed by the historic witness of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt and the newness of life it continues to experience. For many years this strong church has been led by committed Egyptian leaders. Their journey has not been easy, but in the future they see unprecedented opportunities in changing circumstances, fewer restrictions, and more doors opening to ministry.

In Egypt and across the Middle East, Presbyterian World Mission has an enormous opportunity to support the steadfast witness of the region's Christians. We have long-standing relationships with the Protestant communions in the Middle East as well as with Orthodox churches and other Christian groups. Our mission co-workers who serve in the region know the local languages and cultures, and work effectively alongside our partners.

Despite unspeakable hardships Middle Eastern Christians remain faithful. You'll find them caring for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, educating preschool children in Iraq, and working for peace in Palestine and Israel. In many places, Christian communities trace their spiritual heritage directly to the preaching of one of the apostles. Beginning in the 19th century, Presbyterians added their voices to the Christian witness in the Middle East by planting churches, starting hospitals, and founding schools. In recent years, however, war, persecution, and economic distress have caused many Christians to leave the region. The Christian population in the Middle East has shrunk from 20 percent a century ago to 5 percent today.

I am excited by our opportunity to walk alongside our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Presbyterians in Egypt are inviting us to step up our involvement with them as they enter the new day they see dawning. Other Middle Eastern partners are asking us to accompany them in new and creative ways as they face extremely challenging circumstances. I urge you to participate in these partnerships through your praying and giving.

Whatever the future holds, hope will always abound in the Middle East and around the world. For this we can thank a loving God who 2,000 years ago became flesh and visited the Middle East. It was there Jesus lived, died, and rose again. Let us forget neither the cradle of our faith nor the foundation of our hope.

Terri Bate is senior director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Funds Development Ministry. Contact her at terri.bate@pcusa.org

Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo trains leaders for ministry in the Arab world

In November 2014, the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) hosted a celebration of its 150th anniversary. The 105 guests, from 17 nations, clearly demonstrated ETSC's global reach.

Early Presbyterian missionaries saw education as the key to serving the Egyptian people. Theological education began on the houseboat Ibis, which would sail the Nile River from Luxor to Cairo. Students were trained in academics during the day, and in the evenings, ministered in area villages, and contributed to planting a large number of churches in the provinces of Minya and Assiut.

In 1919, Synod of the Nile took up the challenge to build a permanent structure to house the seminary in Cairo. Rev. Muaawwad Hanna of Assiut was designated chairperson of the committee charged with raising the monies needed for this venture. In 1926 the seminary moved to its current location in Abbassia, Cairo.

Until 1960, the seminary offered a three-year bachelor of ministry degree program. In addition to academic courses, students received practical training in ministry, including internships that took them throughout the country.

Some years later, when seminary leaders recognized the need for expanded academic preparation of students, the seminary switched to a four-year degree program. In the eighties and nineties, a branch was opened in Alexandria, and in 2011 another branch was opened in Minya. In 1999 the seminary opened a master's study program in theology, biblical studies, and Middle Eastern Christianity.

Since the year 2000, the seminary has undergone renovation of its facilities as well as its academic programs. Currently, degree programs are offered in



Arabic for the master of divinity and master of arts in theology. English tracks include the master of arts in organizational leadership and the Th.M. The library houses 53,000 books as well as a number of rare books and manuscripts, making it one of the largest theological libraries in the Middle East.

Although an institution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt, the seminary's 330 students prepare for service in churches not only in Egypt but throughout the Arab world.

Despite the recent unrest in Egypt, ETSC continues to prepare thoughtful leaders for the church. The seminary's president, Atef Gendy, says ETSC's vision for today is to "encourage young people to be part of society, to be proactive. We train students in ministries of compassion 'on the streets, in the slums.' This is what it means to be a grassroots church."

2014 graduates of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, who will witness and minister around the world

Presbyterian Mission in EGYPT

1854 Evangelical mission in Egypt begins. Initial focus is on educational work leading to the establishment of schools for girls and boys, and medical work leading to the founding of hospitals where both women and men physicians are active.

1860 Ibis is purchased and becomes a mobile mission station. The missionaries tour the Nile and stop on its banks. Wherever they land they engage the Egyptians in friendly conversation, distribute religious literature, conduct worship services on board the Ibis, and explain the tenets of the Protestant faith. It later serves as a mobile seminary.

The IBIS



1863 The Evangelical Seminary is established.

1896 Dr. Anna B. Watson and Dr. Caroline Lawrence begin medical work among women. Their work leads to the establishment of Tanta Hospital in 1904.

1900 Presbyterians run 165 schools with around 10,000 total students. Christians and Muslims, boys and girls: the gift of education is meant for all.

Christian witness in Egypt:

The church in the midst of revolution

By Ramez Atallah

What is the real situation of Christians in Egypt?

Before the coming of Islam to Egypt in the seventh century, the main religion of the country was Christianity. The Christian minority (8 to 12 percent) in Egypt is directly descended from those who refused to convert to Islam. In spite of being discriminated against and the many limitations some experience as “second class” citizens, many Christian entrepreneurs have thrived with the free market economy that began in Egypt in the early '70s, and it is estimated that they now control a significant portion of Egypt's wealth.

Many churches in Egypt are flourishing with plans to expand their facilities to accommodate the growing numbers of weekly worshippers. In spite of the great difficulty in getting permission to build new churches, dozens of new church buildings are opened every year. Christian ministries of all sorts are also booming, with expanded programs and modern facilities to accommodate their activities.

So what's the true picture of Christians in Egypt: “a persecuted minority” or “a thriving community”? Both statements are true. Like Christians everywhere in the world, those who name the name of Jesus are often ridiculed or scorned. Although Jesus is respected by all Muslims as a prophet and they affirm his virgin birth, tensions have always existed between Christians and some of their Muslim neighbors. Sometimes these tensions spill over into violence especially in rural areas where the rule of law is less enforced.

A period of unprecedented change

Since the remarkable events of the 18-day popular revolution (January 25–February 11, 2011), Egypt has been in a state of constant

change. Four years later we are on our third constitution, third president, and expecting the election of our third parliament!

The most remarkable development during these four years, however, undoubtedly has been the wholesale rejection by the majority of Egyptians of the Islamists agenda of “Political Islam.” Analysts have referred to this as a modern day “miracle”! No one expected it.

With the political pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other several times, where are we now as Christians today?

In this short article I can only give a brief bird's eye view of how the church in Egypt has responded to this rapid and unexpected change and some of the challenges facing us.

Political sensitization

Before January 25, 2011, it was nearly impossible to find a Christian interested in politics. Christians never voted, and had very little nationalistic fervor. Several years would go by without a pastor ever making reference to Christian social responsibility except as it related to the poor Christians whom his church served.

The same also was true of the average Muslim Egyptian.

But January 25 and what followed changed this. The main topic of conversation of Egyptians for the past four years has been politics. Newspapers and TV stations that did not exist then, now have a very large readership or audience from all walks of life. The best known TV personalities used to be well-known actors. Now they are well-known political writers or anchor men/women who host political/social talk shows and attract large audiences.

Before January 25 newspapers and TV shows rarely involved women or Christians. Now TV talk

1912 Training Schools for “Bible Women” are opened in Zagazig and Tanta.

1914 Dr. Charles A. Watson founds the school that will eventually become the American University in Cairo (AUC).

1917 Britain declares its support of “the establishment in Palestine of a national home



Missionary teachers at girls' school in Cairo

1919 Demonstrations against the British occupation erupt throughout Egypt. Suppressive reactions by British authorities ignite hostility against Westerners and burning of Christian stores. US President Woodrow Wilson supports British rule of Egypt and disappoints Egyptian aspirations for self-determination.

shows dealing with many different topics often include women and Christians as guests!

Without planning it the church has become an integral part of Egyptian society in a way we could never have dreamed of!

The church on the cutting edge

Churches near places where violence took place between demonstrators and police opened their facilities as “field clinics” to serve the wounded. Kasr El Doubara Presbyterian Church being located right off Tahrir Square (the epicenter of the revolution) was a pioneer in this field and got the attention and admiration of the whole nation for this courageous and loving ministry.

The Bible Society of Egypt had a two-year campaign titled “Rebuild Egypt” with banners, ads in newspapers, and Scripture selections, all pointing to the Bible as a source of principles which uphold the noble aspirations of the revolution for freedom, social justice, and human dignity.

Christians in a variety of social ministries have been able to make their services known through the much greater exposure now accessible to them, and thus impact a much broader sector of society. Some groups have been successful in hosting friendly yet frank interfaith dialogue between leaders of the two religions.

Future challenges

In the early days of the revolution, Egyptians genuinely believed that a new era of complete openness and democracy was being ushered in. But, they soon saw this newfound freedom exploited and eventually hijacked by the Islamists’ theocratic plans. “The Islamists climbed to power on the ladder of democracy and then pulled up the ladder with them.”

On June 30, 2013, Egyptians went to the streets in unprecedented numbers calling for Morsi’s removal. When he stubbornly refused to accept the will of the majority of Egyptians, the Army implemented the people’s wish.

In the national elections that followed, the overwhelming popularity of Al-Sisi meant that Egypt now has a president who has been voted in by the vast majority of Egyptians, unlike Morsi who only had a slim majority of the votes.

The Islamists responded, and continue to respond, violently to their removal. Keeping Egypt free from the Islamists has been at the expense of the newly acquired human rights. Politically sensitive folks fear that the present suspension of many human rights may lead to a return to some form of totalitarianism, thus crushing the Revolutionaries’ dream of a truly democratic Egypt.

Many Christians, however, pleased with their newfound “freedoms,” welcome this crushing of the Islamists uncritically. This seemingly unconditional support of the government’s war on extremism may prove to be a costly mistake for Christians in the long run—one that may tarnish the church’s witness and weaken its ability to promote social justice.

Egypt needs your prayers so that its political leaders will find a way to keep at bay the Islamists without completely abrogating human rights. Christian leaders need your prayers so that they hold firmly to biblical principles and not sell out to political pragmatism. It’s a tough balance that only God can provide!

Ramez Atallah is general director of the Bible Society of Egypt.

1919 Synod of the Nile takes up the challenge to build a permanent structure to house the theological seminary in Cairo. A plot of land is purchased in Abbassia, Cairo. In 1926 Mission transfers responsibility for theological education to Synod of the Nile.

1939 WWII begins. Mission personnel are evacuated, but return in fewer numbers in 1945.

1948 US government recognizes the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine. Presbyterian missionaries question the decision as unjust for the indigenous population of Palestine, and protest the US government’s action.

Presbytery of Egypt, 1892



1950 The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) is established. It addresses social and cultural development, individual well-being, social justice and, intercultural harmony.

1960^s The responsibility for the total mission program is assumed by Synod of the Nile.

Growing the church in Egypt

The need to minister to a growing number of already underserved Christians has never been greater.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (EPCE) was planted by missionaries of our church more than 150 years ago and is today, the largest Protestant church in the Middle East. With the revolution that began January 25, 2011, there is unprecedented openness to the church's role in society. Studies conducted by the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) show that more than 70 percent of Christian Egyptians do not have access to a church. Although Christians represent more than 10 percent of Egypt's primarily Muslim population, two-thirds of Christians in Egypt have no church to attend because of the limited capacity of churches of all denominations to minister to the people.

The EPCE's congregations, presbyteries, and

councils currently oversee more than 66 new church developments in cities and remote villages. In recent years, the Egyptian government has given land to EPCE to build 14 new church buildings, and made significantly simpler the process to obtain building permits. This is unprecedented in the history of Egypt since the Arab Islamic conquest in the seventh century.

For legal, cultural, and security reasons, a worshiping community in Egypt cannot meet or function outside a church building. It is not possible for a congregation to exist without a specifically designated church building. One of the major obstacles in planting new churches is funding for buildings.

As a partner, World Mission is working with the EPCE to fund construction of new churches and hiring organizing pastors. The buildings will start at \$80,000. A mission co-worker will be needed to coordinate new church construction and other assignments. The cost is \$83,000 for four years.

In addition to buildings, there is a critical need for more trained pastors to lead congregations in worship. More than any other institution in the Middle East, the ETSC has trained pastors for churches from Libya to Syria to Iraq. It continues to grow by offering access to satellite campuses and online courses in Arabic. The ETSC and World Mission are hoping to fund a New Testament professor at the ETSC in Cairo.

Many students want to serve God but do not have the financial resources to further their education. For \$7,000 an individual or congregation can sponsor a student from Sudan, Syria, or Iraq.

To learn more about the projects underway, visit pcusa.org/egypt-church.

» Support

Help us Grow the Church in Egypt! Make a gift via the Web: presbyterianmission.org/donate/E200102 or by mail to: PC(USA), P.O. Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA, 15264-3700. And note on your gift "Grow the Church in Egypt" with E200102.



There are 66 new Presbyterian churches planned for Egypt.

1967

Israel attacks Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Missionaries are suspected of siding with Israel, and are evacuated for their safety, but return in fewer numbers a year later.

2000

Ministries of Synod of the Nile included 350 congregations, three hospitals, 22 schools, and several locally run clinics and various outreach ministries.



Charles Watson founded the American University in Cairo

Today

PC(USA) personnel serve in active partnership alongside Egyptian Presbyterians to give witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through ministries of compassion and discipleship.

Bryan and Janice Beck's lessons from the past encourage stewardship

By Pat Cole

Bryan and Janice Beck's life of generosity is a story told in three stages: past, present, and future.

Their story begins in the homes where they were raised. "My parents and Janice's parents were generous stewards," Bryan says. Both observed their parents sharing their time and resources with their communities and congregations.

"I admired both of my parents for that, and I really wanted to do the same at some point in my life," Janice says.

Janice grew up in a Methodist family in the Gulf Coast region of Texas. Bryan, a cradle Presbyterian, spent his formative years in Washington state and West Texas. Thirty years ago, the couple moved to Albuquerque, where Bryan, a physician, practiced cardiology until his retirement in 2013. Janice, an educator, teaches preschool children.

Not long after moving to Albuquerque, the Becks joined Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church and grew to appreciate the mission history of Presbyterians in New Mexico. That heritage, like the legacy of sharing they received from their parents, helped form their commitment to serving and giving.

"One of the footprints of the Presbyterian Church in New Mexico is the establishment of mission outreach, especially in terms of health care, hospitals, and education," Bryan says. "These were models for me and for Janice."

"I got a sense of how striking the Presbyterian Church is in its mission work," Janice adds.

Inspired by their spiritual forebears, the Becks delved into Presbyterian Church (USA.) mission. They have served as volunteers with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance both nationally and internationally, and they participate in their congregation and presbytery's partnerships with Presbyterians in Cuba. They have supported disaster assistance, hunger ministries, and mission co-workers with financial gifts.

As they write the current chapter of their generosity story, Bryan and Janice look toward the saga's final chapter. Half of their estate will go to their two sons, Brandon and Justin, and the other half will be divided among their congregation, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and other causes dear to them.



Despite a record of giving generously, Bryan says he wrestles with what it means to be a good steward. "Janice and I are blessed to be able to give almost painlessly," he says.

The Becks have come to believe that faithful stewardship includes sharing their values and passions with others. Following their own parents' lead, they taught their now grown sons about service and generosity. Both sons have been mission volunteers in Latin America and the US. Justin now works with youth in East Palo Alto, CA, a low-income community in one of the nation's wealthiest counties.

In their Presbyterian family, they seek to inspire others to give. They joined with other donors who collectively promised late last fall to match all gifts given to mission co-worker support, up to \$75,000. That match was met as well as a \$62,480 follow-up challenge from other donors.

Also in 2014, Bryan and Janice hosted a dinner to encourage financial support for mission co-workers. In presenting giving opportunities to friends, they are trusting that they will "get excited about the information we share with them," Bryan says.

The Becks hope this excitement will spark a new chapter in the generosity stories of others.

Healing wounds and sustaining hope in the Armenian church

By Cara Taylor

Armenians endure as one of the oldest Christian nations in the Middle East. The ancient nation had already existed 1100 years when Armenia adopted Christianity as its state religion. Centered geographically on Noah's Mount Ararat, it survived the clash of Egyptian, Mongol, Byzantine, Arab, Persian, and Ottoman cultures. Today's Republic of Armenia is the size of Maryland, bordered by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey.

The attempted elimination of Armenians by Ottoman Turks 100 years ago was the first genocide of the 20th century and a model for Adolf Hitler. Presbyterians sent relief throughout WWII as over two million people were systematically exterminated or displaced. Survivors later erected Holy Martyrs Armenian Church and Memorial in the desert at Der Zor, Syria—until an ISIS attack took it down last September.

Many Armenians again find themselves refugees in their own land. The Jinishian Memorial Program is a main contributor to their survival. It began in 1966 when Vartan Jinishian gave his entire estate in his parents' memory to care for Armenians in the Middle East.

Jinishian's Syria director, Talin Topalakian, and her staff have traversed dangerous territory to deliver emergency aid, gather the needy for Easter, or minister to traumatized children. "As descendants of heroic survivors and having the same strong faith,

we are confident that God hears our cry and will save our nation once again."

Jinishian, with a 50-year legacy of service and 100 percent local teams, now reaches over 40,000 Armenians each year in Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, Turkey, and Jerusalem.

"Everywhere we work is under ongoing conflict, politically tense, and vulnerable," says Executive Director Eliza Minasyan. "We are unique in that we partner equally with Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical churches and serve the community as a whole. We swiftly adapt to constantly changing conditions and provide everything from emergency relief to long-term community development and discipleship programs."

In Syria and Lebanon Jinishian emphasizes medical assistance due to war, scarcity, and inflation, but nearby Armenia focuses on sustainable impact. Dozens of projects in this post-Soviet republic include prenatal care, clean water, micro-lending; and about 3,000 needy or disabled children each year—many from villages with no church—encounter Christ at summer camp. Country Director Armen Hakobyan says the best part "is hearing the stories of faith. They are learning to live in peace and love and bringing this experience home."

Learn and Pray. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) designated Sunday, April 26, 2015, for national commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. Rev. Christine Chakoian, Presbyterian pastor in Lake Forest, IL, believes this action "helps ensure that no other peoples experience such suffering and [it] witnesses to the Christians who are persecuted in the region today that they are not forgotten." Find materials for your congregation at pcusa.org/jinishian including curriculum, liturgies, videos, ways to invite a speaker on Armenian genocide to your church.

Adopt a project. From Liberty Corner Church in NJ to St. James in Tarzana, CA, congregations are partnering with Jinishian in Armenia and the Middle East. For those in Southern California, Bel Air Presbyterian invites you to learn more about Armenian missions on Sunday, June 7, 2015. Other regions may contact jinishian@pcusa.org.

Travel to Armenia. Each year, the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary hosts a tour. This year's tour is scheduled for October 8–18.

One hundred years after the Armenian genocide, the Jinishian Memorial Program keeps hope alive through critical relief to surviving generations—enduring violence in Syria, overcoming poverty in Lebanon, and clinging to their legacy of faith in Christ. In the Republic of Armenia (above), Jinishian micro-loans and new technologies restore dignity and independence to this tenacious people.



PRESBYTERIAN MISSION IN IRAN

1832 **Mission pioneers visit Persia** (present-day Iran) to investigate the possibility of opening mission work. They receive a warm welcome. In 1834 Two missionaries are sent to Persia to revitalize the Assyrian Church.

1835 **Educational, medical and evangelistic mission begins in**

Urumia with the purpose of having missions of fellowship with the Oriental churches, not to establish separate Protestant churches.



Tehran Presbyterian Church, 1919

1838 **A school for girls is established in Urumia** teaching practical and academic courses. By 1895, 117 schools are established in Persia with 2,410 pupils.

1839 **A printing press is brought to Urumia**, and by 1852 the Bible is printed in the Assyrian language.

1862 **The Synod of the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in Iran is formed.** Within a decade, congregations are organized in Urumia and Tehran.

1874 **Iran Bethel School for Girls is established.** In 1918, the Alumnae Association of the school begins publication of the magazine *World of Women* to empower women. The school survives until today under the name *Damavand College*.

1880^s Westminster Hospital (named after Westminster Church in Buffalo, NY, that provided the funds for the hospital building) is established in Urumia. Subsequently, hospitals are established in Tehran, Hamadan, Kermanshah, Tabriz, Mashhad, and Rasht.

1884 Five presbyteries are organized and include 25 organized churches, 48 congregations, 36 ordained ministers, and 30 licentiates.

1914
1918 WWI, The mission compound in Urumia becomes a place of refuge for Armenians and Assyrians fleeing from Turkish forces who are massacring them. At times there are 15,000 refugees sheltering in the mission compound. In 1917, members of the Assyrian Presbyterian Church flee Urumia before approaching Kurdish forces. Many missionaries accompany them.



Armenian refugees, 1915

1918 **A government medical college is established in Teheran.** Missionaries turn over the responsibility of training doctors to the government.

1920 **Assyrian Christians return to Urumia to begin rebuilding their lives and their churches.** But work of the Mission is restricted, and thus is shifted to eastern Persia. Mashhad becomes a center for evangelistic, medical, and educational work.

1920^s **In Rasht, a new building for relief work is made possible by gifts of American Sunday School children.** The Mashhad hospital is erected through gifts of the Iowa Synodical Society. A new hospital is established in Kermanshah through a gift from Westminster Church of Buffalo, NY.

1930^s **Presbyterian Mission Elementary Schools are closed** by an order of the Iranian government stipulating that the education of Iranian children is the exclusive privilege of the government. School properties are bought by the government of Iran from the Presbyterian Mission.

1950^s **Presbyterian missionaries labor alongside Iranian church leaders.** Priorities are given to girls' education, teaching practical skills to poor women, and providing medical care for the poorest of the poor.

1953 **US and UK governments orchestrate the military overthrow of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh.** Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi is reinstated Shah of Iran, and relies heavily on US government support to hold on to power.

1968 **The Synod is reorganized along linguistic lines:** Armenian Presbytery, Assyrian Presbytery, and Persian Presbytery.

1979 **Islamic Revolution ousts US-backed government of Shah.** All Presbyterian missionaries are forced to leave Iran.

Today **PC(USA) maintains ecumenical relationships with the Synod of Evangelical Churches in Iran** through the World Council of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches.



Tehran Presbyterian Church, 2000

Observing compassionate acts by individuals of different faiths

By Rick A. Jones

As the son of a Baptist minister, I learned early the good, the bad, and sometimes, the ugly of church work. My father would spend 60 hours a week or more ministering to those in need. In my view, there was too much to do in our own community to worry about what was going on overseas. Then I went to the Middle East.

As a communications strategist for the PC(USA), my job was to cover the moderator's visit to Iraq and Israel/Palestine. It seemed to be a fairly straightforward task. But what I received was an education in Christian witness in Iraq and Palestine.

I caught up with the moderator's delegation in Erbil, Iraq, and quickly realized the conflict involving the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Levant (ISIS/ISIL) was not specifically Muslim versus Christian.

As we traveled to Kirkuk, we met with nearly 100 displaced Iraqi Christians who had taken refuge at the Presbyterian Church. Many cried as they described how the militants gave them the ultimatum to convert to Islam, leave their homes, or face death. Some shared stories of how their Muslim neighbors took personal risks to help Christian families escape ISIL's clutches.

I was struck by the compassionate acts of individuals of different faiths. The walls of religious separation had been torn down by a common humanity. If ISIL had sought to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims, the group's radical and violent approach appeared to have had the opposite impact.

Moderator Heath Rada and his delegation listened to church leaders detail the struggle they faced to meet the humanitarian needs of not only Christian, but also Muslim families in the region.



Moderator Heath Rada talks to children in Iraq during his visit last fall.

Days later, the delegation was in the heart of Palestinian territory, dealing with a different conflict. Aida Refugee Camp, outside Bethlehem, has been home for hundreds of Palestinian refugees since 1948. The camp has been scarred by gunfire. The huge walls surrounding the camp have been covered with drawings and other graffiti as residents struggle to tell the world their story.

The delegation befriended a young man at the Aida camp who has grown up in a conflict zone. Muhammad Fararjeh, 32, is one of 14 children of a Muslim father who fled to Bethlehem as a young boy in 1948. Muhammad lost his mother when he was born, but he has experienced Christian compassion throughout his life. A Christian neighbor cared for him as an infant, and he spent five years at a nearby Catholic day care.

Muhammad told the team how a Palestinian Lutheran pastor had introduced him to the church and that he spent the remainder of his childhood and teen years nurtured in the Lutheran atmosphere, attending daily chapel and Sunday church services and singing Christian hymns. Muhammad actively shared in the school's prayer life while remaining a Muslim and studying the teachings of his faith.

As Muhammad watched his family suffer the physical and emotional pain of displacement by the Israeli occupation, he felt compelled to join other youth in acts of violence against Israeli soldiers.

"Yet, I couldn't because I had been taught about Jesus and loving your enemies at the Lutheran school," he said. "I began to engage in conversations with the Israeli soldiers and would get together with some of them who could no longer fight. I was not betraying the cause of our people, only seeking a different way to pursue peace."

Muhammad's story is one of many echoed by Palestinians we encountered in our visit, each seeking a peaceful way of sharing culture and beliefs without resorting to violence.

As we sit comfortably in our pews and ponder all that we do to glorify God, I can't help but think of Christian leaders choosing to stay in Iraq staying in the midst of battle to help strangers from all walks of life. I can't help but think of a new generation of Palestinian youth growing up in a world of concrete and mortar fire, shattered homes and jail bars.

It's not about choosing sides; it's about hearing Christ's call to be a light in a world full of darkness.

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION IN IRAQ

1932 **Eli Smith and Harrison Dwight travel east from Syria** to survey where Presbyterian mission could be welcomed. In 1839 The Eastern Syria Mission begins at Mosul (in present-day Iraq).

1851 **A church is organized in the city of Mosul.** (A century and a half later, the congregation is decimated following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq due to sectarian violence.)

1880^s **The Presbyterian Church begins a mission to Kurdistan region.** The Reformed Church in America (RCA) establishes mission stations further south in Basrah and Amarah.

1915
1918 **The massacres and expulsion of the Armenians and Assyrians decimates Christian presence in Asia Minor.** Many of the survivors settle in Iraq and Persia. The mission provides relief and shelter to refugees.

1920^s **Presbyterians and RCA establish a United Mission in Iraq.**

1930
1940^s **Colonial intrusion by Britain and France in the region creates hostile feelings** toward foreigners, and negatively impacts mission activities.

1948 **US government recognizes the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine,** which further complicates the work of mission.

1950^s **A popular revolution brings an end to the monarchy and colonial influence.** Perceptions that foreigners have been supportive of the deposed government result in further restrictions on the work of the mission. Male mission personnel are expelled. The church in Mosul calls a pastor from Egypt to replace American personnel. The Kirkuk church ordains an Iraqi pastor. Efforts of the mission are limited to educational work with the schools in Baghdad and Basrah.

Bible Wagon at a Kurdish camp



1958 **The United Mission in Iraq is restructured** and identifies its aims as "the greatest possible assistance to the people of Iraq, by (1) bearing witness to the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, (2) ministering to people's needs of all kinds, to the end that they may have life more

abundantly, (3) giving support to the national goals and aspirations for social reform, (4) strengthening the life of the churches in whatever denominational or ecumenical ways may be available, and (5) helping, through God's message of reconciliation, to heal the enmities which separate people from God and from each other and to bring to bear on the life of individuals and of the nation the spirit and principles of Christ."



Missionaries crossing the Tigris River in a Goofa

1962 **A draft constitution for the Evangelical Synod of Iraq is drawn up** with six organized churches and three active ordained ministers. The number of members is estimated to be 2,000.

1967 **Israel's attack on neighboring Arab states leads to heightened anti-American and anti-Christian sentiments.** All mission personnel are evacuated to Iran.

1968 **Baath Party coup brings Saddam Hussein to power.** Within two years, all bank accounts in Baghdad are frozen. Iraqi government seizes properties in Mosul, Bahsheeqa, and Basra. Mission teachers are expelled at the end of the school year. The mission decides that all personnel should actively prepare to leave Iraq. The United Mission in Iraq wraps up its affairs in the country.

1974 **Middle East Council of Churches is inaugurated to bring together Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches in the region.** The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partners with and supports the work of the Council and its member churches.

2003 **US-led military invasion of Iraq initiates a new period of persecution for Christians.** Thousands are killed. Many Christians flee to neighboring countries and elsewhere. Two Presbyterian congregations in Baghdad and Mosul close due to violence. Only three congregations remain in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Basra.

2014 **Militant Islamist factions unite in northern Iraq and Syria to form the "Islamic State."** Hundreds of thousands of minorities, including Christians, are forced to flee. No more Christians remain in the Nineveh Plains, which had been home for Christians for two millennia.

Today **PC(USA) personnel serve in active partnership alongside Iraqi Christians** to give witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ in the midst of difficulties and hardships.

Sermon on the Mount rescued Dr. Isaac's faith and brought him closer to God

By Kate Taber

Dr. Munther Isaac is a Palestinian Christian from Beit Sahour, a town neighboring Bethlehem in Palestine. He was born into a Greek Orthodox family, but at age 10 he began attending a small church in Bethlehem belonging to the Presbyterian Bible denomination. Isaac studied civil engineering, but after he felt a call to ministry, he studied at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Since 2005, Isaac has taught at Bethlehem Bible College, where he also directs the Christ at the Checkpoint conference. He recently earned a PhD through the Oxford Center for Mission Studies. Currently, Isaac is a candidate for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. I had the privilege of interviewing him on January 23, 2015.

You said in your address to the Kairos Palestine conference that the Sermon on the Mount rescued your faith. What did you mean?

That's actually true. The most urgent question for me in my whole life has been about the land and the people. When I was 15 years old, and in high school, I wrote my first paper asking, "Who are God's chosen people?" Why would a 15-year-old write a paper like this? It's because we hear all around us that God favored one nation over the other. We are told that this land—where I grew up, that we inherited from our great-great-grandfathers—is not ours. In the end I wrote my PhD on the theology of the land. But the peace in my heart could not come from theological arguments. What helped me move forward is the Sermon on the Mount because it showed me how to live and how to make a difference. It showed me an alternative way.

It's a challenge to live a different life, not just individually but as a community. How can we help young Palestinians, who don't have hope because of the political situation, who sometimes feel the church has let them down? How can we help them stay here and be a witness? I believe the Sermon on the Mount gives us an answer. As strange as it sounds, we must be poor in spirit, meek, to survive here. We must do it boldly. We must be convinced that we have to resist evil with good. We need to be courageous and trust in God's calling. The sermon continues to challenge me.



Munther Isaac teaching at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine.

Is there an example you can give of the Christian community here, living that out?

There are many, many examples. We do Christ at the Checkpoint. It is an international conference in which we invite evangelicals from around the world to come and have a discussion at the Checkpoint and ask, "What would Jesus do? How would he respond to the conflict, to occupation?" Many of the people we invite are Christian Zionists. We challenge them, and they challenge us. One of our main goals is to challenge the theologies in the West that exclude Palestinians.

One of the surprising outcomes has been the huge interest from young Palestinian Christians. I can't forget what one told me after the second conference: "Now we feel we can contribute. Now we feel our faith is relevant." All of sudden, the church is talking about things that matter to their daily lives, instead of only telling them how to get to heaven. My students came to me and said, "Let's

start a movement for young Palestinians. Let's begin with a big conference in Arabic where we ask these questions: How do we live our faith here? How can we be relevant? How do we love our neighbors and enemies in a practical way, not just a theoretical way?" It's an important development. Palestinian Christians are putting aside theological differences, asking the urgent questions, and working together.

How would you hope American Christians would engage with the Holy Land?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Do we take him seriously? If you want to be a peacemaker on this issue, you have to come here. You have to meet people. You have to listen to all the perspectives. You have to see with your own eyes. After that, you have to make choices. Many Christians around the world use the phrase from Ps. 122:6 "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." What does it mean? For peace to be here, there must be justice and equality. It is clear today that there is no justice.

Come and challenge injustice in a spirit of love, the way Jesus did, the way Paul urges us to do in Romans 12. But you have to take a stand. It's my concern that so many Christians around the world are becoming too nice, too diplomatic, toothless. They tell us to get along, and [they] give money to both sides. That's not what we need. That's going to maintain the occupation.

It was heartwarming when we heard about the decision of the Presbyterian Church (USA.) in support of divestment. It is important, not because it's going to end the occupation, but because it shows that there are Christians who are refusing to be only polite. Be on the right side of history. That's my hope for Christians in the world today.

Be bold. We are tired of Christians who won't take a stand out of fear of offending the other side. Jesus offended many people when he was here. If our concern is not offending people, then we cannot begin to be peacemakers.

What is one thing you want Presbyterian Americans to know?

They can be part of good change. They can help make a difference here. I say that because I believe in God, in the resurrection. I believe that God still uses us. It may seem hopeless, but remember what Jesus said about the mustard seed. Small steps matter. Small initiatives matter. If that is the direction the Presbyterian Church feels led to, then I hope you do it with conviction that the Spirit can use you to effect change in this part of the world.



*Munther Isaac
with Jewish theologian
Marc Ellis*

Middle East networks: Get involved in a mission by joining a network

Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network

Elmarie Parker
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Egypt Partnership Network

Steve Gorman
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Israel-Palestine Mission Network

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Iran Partnership Network

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Presbyterian World Mission brings God's global family together to address poverty, work toward reconciliation, and proclaim God's saving love in Jesus Christ.

Michael and Rachel Ludwig, Niger

Since they arrived in 2014, Michael and Rachel Ludwig have worked to strengthen the literacy skills of both Muslims and Christians in Niger, a country where only 30 percent of the people can read and write. Because pastors are among the most educated people in a community, they are often approached for help. Michael helps pastors and evangelists in the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger (EERN) raise their proficiency as literacy teachers and works with students and teachers at two Bible schools. Additionally, he is acquainting the EERN with the Community Health Evangelism model, an initiative that integrates community-based development, evangelism, and discipleship. Rachel and Michael are working together to serve with the church and in the community as God leads and to raise their two children.

The Ludwig family is strengthened by the guidance offered by 2 Corinthians 2:17: "For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence."

"This informs our mission service because it reminds us to be genuine in sharing things of God that are life giving and that are relational, coming as a result of our own relationship with God. [The unacceptable alternative would be] trying to get people to sign on to some program because we need to carry through our preconceived agenda of what people in Africa need," Michael says.

The Ludwigs are grateful for the gifts of communication, prayer, and financial support that enable them to share their gifts with people in Niger. They ask for prayerful support for the leadership of the EERN and its vision to strengthen the church. If you'd like to give financially or provide encouragement for us, please use the following donation code. As Paul reminds the Romans, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.

To support the Ludwigs in Niger:
presbyterianmission.org/donate/E200513



Doug and Elaine Baker, Ireland and the UK

Doug Baker first experienced Northern Ireland as a college student in the summer of 1970 when he was invited to work in Northern Ireland through a program sponsored by University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. A deep love and concern for the people brought him back to Northern Ireland as a mission co-worker. Now, many years later, he has invested much of his life in the region.

Doug is now the PC(USA)'s regional liaison for Ireland and the United Kingdom. In this role, he helps Presbyterians in the US become involved in ministry in Ireland and the UK and works to maintain relationships with partner churches.

He is also responsible for coordinating the Northern Ireland Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program. In addition to supporting youth and children's programs in congregations, YAVs spend part of each week involved in community projects. Doug mentors YAVs as they learn to live in an intentional Christian community, serve the church's mission, and engage in vocational discernment. Doug's wife, Elaine, assists in the ministries with YAVs and also helps facilitate group visits from the US.

"I see the YAVs making wonderful contributions not only in what they contribute during the year they serve in Northern Ireland," Doug says, "but in the leadership roles that they are taking on in the PC(USA) when they return to the United States."

Doug graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle in 1972 and received his master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1976. He served as associate pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, until his appointment to Ireland. He is a clergy member of the Presbytery of Donegal.



Elaine is a native of Belfast and first became involved in reconciliation efforts with the Corrymeela Community in the early 1970s. From 1973 to 1984 she taught eleven 18-year-olds at the Belfast Royal Academy and contributed as a volunteer to various Corrymeela programs. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and an active elder in their congregation in Stormont.

To support the Bakers in Northern Ireland and the UK:

presbyterianmission.org/donate/E200310

Scott and Elmarie Parker, Lebanon

Elmarie Parker is the regional liaison for Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. She works to strengthen partnerships, programs, and relationships for World Mission as well as its mission co-workers, offering mentoring, sharing, encouragement, and spiritual support. Scott's focus is on young adults, and he is helping the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon develop an English-speaking worshipping community.

The Parkers share an admiration for the faithful commitment of Middle Eastern Christians in an area filled with conflict and suffering.

Since accepting her post in July 2013, Elmarie has visited churches in Iraq and Syria-Lebanon. "I

remember returning from my first trip to Iraq, having been

captured by the heart and courage of these Presbyterian congregations. They have initiated community outreach programs rather than going into hiding amid persecution. Muslim neighbors are asking that the Presbyterian preschools be expanded into primary schools. Presbyterians facilitate a radio ministry proclaiming Christ's message of peace, a prison visitation ministry offering hope to female prisoners, and a community home for senior citizens who have fled the country. Seeing the

faithfulness of the church in these Middle Eastern countries has inspired me to stand with them to do all I can to help deepen and strengthen the ties between them and the congregations and members of the PC(USA)."

Just a few months before leaving for mission orientation, Scott visited a refugee camp in Lebanon filled with people escaping Syria's civil war. He met a family who spent the winter with just a thin tent for shelter and a woman whose father was killed when a bomb leveled a church and whose brother was tortured when he refused to renounce his father. He also met a pastor on vacation preparing to return to his church despite daily death threats.

Both Elmarie and Scott believe the opportunity to work with partners in these Middle Eastern countries and the US matches well their sense of call and their ministerial gifts. Both Scott and Elmarie are teaching elders and members of the Eastminster Presbytery. Before entering mission service, Elmarie served as pastor of Wickliffe Presbyterian Church in Austintown, Ohio, and Scott was a hospital chaplain in Columbus.

To support the Parkers in the Middle East:
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