

Syrian War Has a Personal Dimension for CLC

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It may surprise some of our members to know that Syria is among the sixty countries worldwide with CLC communities. In fact, our Syrian CLCers played a central role in welcoming and hosting delegates at the 2013 World Assembly in Lebanon. As one of the delegates at that Assembly, one of my most profound memories was the joyful presence of those Syrian CLCers at a time when their country was gripped in civil war and some had already suffered loss.

Now in 2016, as the stories and media images of war and fleeing refugees continue unabated, the question that haunts me is, where are our Syrian CLC brothers and sisters? How have they been impacted? These are some of the questions that I have started to search for answers to this year.

This week I contacted Antoine, the former president of CLC/CVX Syria. If there was one face at the Lebanon Assembly that everyone knew, it was that of Antoine. Antoine was the first person most delegates encountered as we arrived at the airport. Like a good shepherd, this joy-filled man herded all of us together and personally transported us to the Assembly venue. On the evening of the banquet, it was Antoine who went from table to table getting everyone up to dance. And on the last night of the Assembly, Antoine didn't sleep at all, ensuring that each person got up at the right time and onto the buses so that no one missed their flight. And yet Antoine, a resident of Aleppo Syria, had lost much. His home and business had been bombed, and his factory dismantled. At the time, he was a refugee in Lebanon with his family. Other Syrian CLCers also shared their stories with us.

Fortunately, Antoine and his family were able to relocate to Canada (he is now with CVX Canada) and they are slowly rebuilding their lives. However, the Syrian CLCers, as you can imagine, are scattered. Some we know are refugees in Lebanon, others remain in Syria, and others, like Antoine and his family, have left the region. I am trying to get further particulars.

However, in this recent contact with Antoine, he sent me a youtube link to a video, which was recently created called, "Alep 2016, Vivre avec les derniers chrétiens"(Aleppo 2016- Living with the last Christians). If you can understand French, I strongly encourage you to watch it: <https://youtu.be/SVPN5ZSDTVI>. What comes forth poignantly in this video is the beauty of the history of the Christian people in the region, dating back to the time of Christ himself. And one of the challenging aspects of the video is that while it applauds, for example, Canada's openness to welcoming refugees, the Syrian Christian church feels betrayed by international players who seem to be favouring a policy of permanently displacing Christians from the region rather than recognizing and upholding the fundamental right of the Church and its people to live and exist there.

Last week, I attended a talk at St. Mary's University in Calgary given by a priest from Syria. He spoke eloquently of his childhood in Homs and how peacefully Christians and Muslims had lived together in the area, side by side as friends and neighbours. His pain over what has been happening in his country over the last six years was evident. I wanted to share with you his plea to pray daily for peace to be restored in Syria, invoking especially the intercession of our mother Mary, Queen of Peace. And I ask you to do so with special emphasis on our CLC brothers and sisters from Syria.

When I was at the World Assembly in Lebanon, I experienced what it was to be a member of a world community, to be one body in Christ. I welled up with love for my CLC brothers and sisters from around

the world and experienced solidarity in a real and tangible way. Let us keep our Syrian CLC members in our prayers and open ourselves to any ways in which the Holy Spirit may be calling us to reach out and act, either by way of direct aid and assistance to those impacted, or by better educating ourselves as to the realities of the region and/or scrutiny of international policies and their impacts.

CLC Lebanon has contacted a member of CLC Canada asking if there is any way that we can help a family of 5 presently living in the refugee camp in Lebanon. This family has expressed a desire to come to Canada. They are originally from Aleppo and have been members of CLC in Syria. They are hoping to begin a new life in a French speaking environment in Canada. Members of CVX Quebec and CLC Canada are working together to hopefully make this happen....Would you like to join us in this mission project?