



Who Is My Neighbor?

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The world shrinks when you meet people. I've been stunned by the number of Wisconsinites I meet everywhere I go, even in Venice, Italy. We have an immediate connection and bond. When we share the same geographical ties, some of our differences seem less important.

So it was with a heavy sadness that I read the message of Rev. Joseph Kassab, General Secretary for the National Evangelical Synod of Syria & Lebanon (NESSL). Not so many years ago, I sat in his office while we talked about shared ministries. He spoke of the good work of NESSL in a predominantly Islamic context in Syria, where the church is respected and trusted. He shared about their ability to do much with little. The world became a little smaller on that trip.

Today he shared a report of the aftermath of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Turkey and Syria. The devastation is horrific. As I write, more than 7,700 people are confirmed dead in the two countries. By the time you read this, it will be more. Because of harsh winter conditions, an already fragile infrastructure due to war in Syria, and the inability to access victims, the death toll will climb. In his news to the Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network (SLPN), Rev. Kassab shared this update from Syria, "Although Aleppo is the most hit by the earthquake, the earthquake completely or partially toppled many buildings in the stricken cities of Latakia and Hama, and there are surrounding villages that were destroyed and have become completely doomed.

"It is important for the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon now to be close to the people who were affected and are still afraid. Of all the disasters that befell us, this is one, so to speak, for which we were not prepared."

Despite the challenges, NESSL's congregations are responding, once again serving as trusted, respected partners. "In a call with our pastor in Aleppo, he informed me that he opened our 'Aleppo College' to receive all people to take refuge in the school building, which is a safe space. The number reached several hundred. The Church is already providing food and warmth. The same in Latakia where the Church received terrified people to find refuge in the Church. It is the same situation in several of our Churches in Syria. Eventually, those people will need mattresses, blankets, and diesel oil for electricity and warmth in the cold winter." As we hold the people of Turkey and Syria in our prayers, let us also give thanks for the witness of the church.

If you would like to donate to Syrian earthquake relief and make the world just a little smaller, Rev. Kassab's message also provided a way to give.

- Make your check out to Highlands United Presbyterian Church (SLPN's fiscal sponsor)
- Write "SLPN-Syria earthquake relief" in the memo line of your check.
- Mail your check to: Ed Sutter, SLPN Treasurer, 4811 Saddle Creek Court, Acworth, GA 30101
- The SLPN treasurer will record all contributions and send them to the treasurer of Highlands United Presbyterian Church for deposit in the account created for SLPN, to be sent to NESSL.