

## ***Tomorrow we may go home: A walk with Syrian brothers and sisters***

by Laurie Kraus, PDA Coordinator

from her editorial for the spring/summer 2014 Mission Mosaic

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In my previous congregation, the season of Lent began and concluded with the prayerful walking of our labyrinth: a way to ground ourselves in the journey of Jesus—a way of suffering and loss that led through death to resurrection. I recently learned, during a February 2014 solidarity visit with PC(USA) church partners in Lebanon and Syria, that Lenten walking can happen anywhere, even without a labyrinth.

For the past two years, civil war in Syria has caused the church in Lebanon and Syria to walk a very different path than before: a hard walk alongside brothers and sisters whose churches, mosques, homes and neighborhoods have been besieged and bombed; neighbors who fled with only the clothes on their back to the mere shelter of plastic tents in the Beqaa Valley on the border between the two lands.

During our visit they poured out their anguish, their hopes, their fears, and then they asked us: will you walk alongside us in this desert of war and necessity? Will you walk with us on the road to Damascus in the midst of confusion and fire, to witness and serve? Will we?

I trod between drainage ditches and tents, watching the shy faces of veiled women, and kneeling to embrace the beautiful little girls who ran from every direction to hug the strangers who walked down the dirt road that has become their new Main Street.



Grounded in the midst of chaos in a way I cannot even begin to imagine, the girls gathered around us, laughing and dancing, clapping and singing — a powerful, uplifting, strong song that I imagined must be some children's tune from the neighborhoods and schools they left behind in Aleppo and Homs. My colleague from World Mission, Amgad Beblawi, stood beside me in silence, listening. The girls finished their song, and Amgad spoke quietly into my ear. He translated: *Yesterday we lived in nice houses. Today we live in tents. Tomorrow, we may go home.*

Within the pages of the spring/summer 2014 *Mission Mosaic*, you will walk with several communities whose Lenten journeys and songs are similar to the one I heard in the camp that day. In South Sudan, violence still marks the lives of citizens and faith communities seeking to build a peaceful commonwealth. In the Philippines, communities devastated by Typhoon Haiyan continue their struggle toward recovery with creativity and courage. PDA's documentary about the effects of gun violence and work with afflicted communities here in the U.S. reminds us that we share a painful journey and responsibility to work for the safety of our own neighborhoods. Through your prayers and gifts to *One Great Hour of Sharing* this season, you can walk with PDA alongside these and many others. *Tomorrow, we may go home.* This is the children's song—of hope in the midst of chaos, a true song of Lent for all of us who have left our settled places behind. May the song lift you up and carry you, all these long days of our Lenten journey, and help your feet to dance on the Easter road homeward.



A college student from Syria had to leave school because of the violence. His displacement has meant two years out of school, and he now works in a restaurant in Beirut. Pictured with the student is Amgad Beblawi, PC(USA) coordinator for World Mission in the Middle East, who was part of the delegation.

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