

10 August 2020

Dear Colleagues,

‘When hope hangs by a thread...’

Refugees in overwhelming numbers, political upheaval, financial collapse, growing poverty and Covid-19. News coverage in recent times has highlighted that Lebanon has been reeling from multiple crises, but according to President Michael Aoun, *“There are no words to describe the catastrophe that hit Beirut last night.”*

Around 6 pm on 4th August, a 2,750 tonne stockpile of highly explosive chemicals was detonated in the port area of the city. As a result of the devastating explosion, more than 150 people have been killed, and some 5,000 injured, with 300,000 residents made homeless as shock waves hit buildings up to 10 km away.

Even residents of Beirut, who had lived through Lebanon’s 15-year civil war, said that this explosion was like nothing they had ever experienced before. During the war, many felt they were suffering for a cause, but this explosion is being attributed to corruption and negligence. It’s not just homes that are devastated but hearts, in such a way that hope is now hanging by a thread.

Over the past 24 hours we have been in communication with PCI’s partners located in Beirut. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), a longstanding partner church, is responding through their development wing, the Compassion Protestant Society, seeking to provide emergency food aid and shelter for the homeless, regardless of a person’s faith background. NESSL’s General Secretary, Rev Joseph Kassab writes, *“We cling to the One who holds the whole world in his hand.... may the Almighty bring peace to our wounded humanity and city...It is a time where the Church has to step into the pain and suffering of innocent people”.*

Dr George Sabra, President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST), writes, *“We thank God that no one was injured at NEST ...the damage to the building is extensive. All eight floors above ground and two basements were hit. Glass windows, glass doors, glass panels inside the building, as well as many internal wooden doors were shattered. Never has NEST been hit so badly...The devastation in the rest of Beirut is vast....the Beirut Port which was almost totally annihilated by the explosion is the storage place for all the necessary imports that Lebanon needs at this difficult time in its severe economic and pandemic crisis: wheat, medications, medical equipment, food, ... all of these have been severely damaged, if not totally destroyed...”*

The Television production studios of SAT7, Christian broadcasters in the Middle East and North Africa and a longstanding partner of PCI, was also damaged. Maroun Bou Rached, Executive Director of SAT 7 in Lebanon said, *“We really need a lot of prayer for Lebanon to be able to get up and move forward. We are focusing now on what we can produce to help and encourage people and to look to God. We need a miracle to continue in this small country. Please pray for calm for everyone in Lebanon.”*

These and others with whom PCI have related in Lebanon over many years, are not only expressing their shock and great need but also the feeling of being overwhelmed by expressions of support. Alia Abboud, Chief Development Officer of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) said, *“Hope is a very rare commodity in my country today...yet we are deeply touched by the genuine concern and solidarity expressed from dear friends and partners from various parts of the world”*. With their lives brutally disrupted and hope hanging by a thread, may I ask you, despite all the challenges we face here on the island of Ireland, to encourage your congregation to see that our prayerful, practical support for the people of Lebanon is paramount in the coming days.

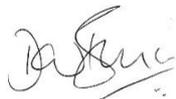
Please pray:

- That the Lebanese people, not least those responsible for governing the country, while tempted to give up in the midst of this disaster, would be infused with fresh hope and know God’s hand providing for every need.
- For PCI’s partners in Beirut, strategically placed for mission in the Middle East Region, to be envisioned, strengthened, wise and determined in finding God’s way forward.
- That we in PCI would prayerfully step into the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters in Christ, indeed of all the people of Lebanon, bringing genuine encouragement and practical support.

While much thought is being given to launching a special appeal towards the end of this year aimed at tackling the impact of Covid-19 on the world’s poorest communities, PCI’s Mission Department is ready to channel any donations you may wish to make at this time to the emergency initiatives being undertaken by our partners in Lebanon. Donations (with the option of gift aid) can be designated to any of the above-named partners by sending a cheque made out to the ‘The Presbyterian Church in Ireland’ to PCI’s Mission Department. Details of how to give by electronic transfer or online can be found on PCI’s website www.presbyterianireland.org/donate. PCI’s development partners, Christian Aid Ireland and Tearfund, are also engaged in the emergency response and details of their initiatives can be found on their websites: www.christianaid.ie and www.tearfund.org

Thank you for taking time to stand with PCI’s partners and the people of Lebanon.

Warm regards,



Rt Rev Dr David Bruce
Moderator of the General Assembly

+44 (0)28 9041 7208 (Office)
+44 (0)7736 547500 (Mobile)
moderator@presbyterianireland.org