

# The Liaison

March 2020



The once-beautiful Syrian city of Homs destroyed due to the Syrian Civil War  
Photo used by permission taken in 2019

## Could Coronavirus Help us be more Compassionate to Refugees?

Iraq - As the Coronavirus grips many with fear, this week I met with 18 Syrian men, within our church in northern Iraq. They left their country because of the violence and have come to Iraq as a staging ground as refugees in hope for immigration to Australia. Some have their children in our program.

*Daily, these men wrestle with the issues of being a refugee in a country that is not their own, trapped in the middle of a conflict that*

*they did not create, walking a path they did not expect.* The ground seems to have been leveled globally with uncertainty, but this time it's an unseen virus bringing many to a sense of panic.

*Rational or irrational fears? Our response to the Coronavirus has the potential to make us more compassionate to refugees whose fears are rational.*

One of the men from Damascus, a chemical engineer, shared how he fled to Homs for safety but when he and his family arrived in this city, found it to have been destroyed. *Can you imagine how incredibly difficult this is for them?* They are not guaranteed immigration, yet they wait, and in hope they look to the future. I reminded the men that Jesus said, "I will never leave you, never will I forsake you," and I shared from Heb. 4:14-16. But as I looked into each man's eyes I asked myself the question, what about today? *These needs are real!* (cont'd on page 4)

*...we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:14-16 Holman*



## IMPRINTING LIVES WITH LOVE & EDUCATION



## Annual Backpack/School Supplies Fundraiser kicks off as John & Dee meet with refugee kids in Iraq!

We've been in Iraq enjoying meeting with some of the refugee kids in our Child Sponsorship Program. Look for updates on FB and [indigenousministries.org](http://indigenousministries.org) and new videos on Indigenous Ministries International YouTube channel.

This year Indigenous Ministries is helping many children in the Middle East and the Philippines go to school with the supplies and uniforms they need through the Backpack/School Supplies Fundraiser. Donate to this worthy cause on our website or use the form on page 4. Thank you!



## Baghdad Pastor Shares Challenges, Joys of Ministry

Ministering in one of the most tumultuous and politically charged Islamic cities in the world, Baghdad, this pastor is definitely dedicated. He and his wife minister under stresses and pressures most of us cannot imagine, yet alone handle. So how does he do it? What does success look like for his church? And do we have a part in all this? The church he serves is a vital beacon of hope in Baghdad. A quiet, pensive and humble servant of the Lord, the man you'll meet is also courageous with a grace in suffering from the Lord. (We are not sharing his picture due to security issues).

I asked him to share with us on several topics giving us entrance into his unique world:

**Pastor, what are some of the ways you are seeing growth in your church?** *Since 2012 till now I have seen that the hand of the Lord is working in a number of people, who believed in Christ, have been baptized, and started serving the Lord in several ministries.*

Each year I have between 3-5 people believing and following in baptisms, in addition, each year several people are believing but they cannot take baptism due to their cultural and traditional challenges. In spite of that I have more than 30 active leaders in the different aspects of the ministry, and most of them are the fruits of the creative ministry that we have started in the end of 2012.

**Pastor, take us back in time. How did you end up in this very challenging ministry in Iraq?** *The date June 26, 2012, was one of the important dates in my life. I went back from Beirut to Baghdad, with my MDiv certificate, to lead the church in Baghdad, in that difficult time. This was when a number of Christian families had left after the massacre of the Lady of Salvation Cathedral.\**

*It was a very difficult time to return, and lead a small congregation, with a small number of leaders. At that time, I was in prayer before God to ask him about the way He wanted me to continue in it, to reach the outsiders with the Gospel.*

*In September in the same year, we developed these Vision and Mission statements:*

- 1. To see God glorified in our ministry and country, through our ministry*
- 2. To witness Christ and His work by what we say and do*

*Between September 2012, until September 2014\*\* the Lord was working in my life, and the team of ministry's lives. In 2014 we started working with displaced families from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, from Mosul, Nineveh plain, and west of Iraq. (Continued on page 3)*

\* The October 31, 2010 attack by six Jihadists during mass at the Lady of Salvation Cathedral, an Assyrian church in Baghdad, left 58 dead including 2 priests, policeman, worshippers, bystanders and all six attackers. Abu Huthaifa al-Batawi, an ISIS commander, was the mastermind of this attack and was killed attempting to escape prison in 2011. This attack shook the Christian community in Iraq. Car bombings and other terrorist violence were also frequent especially in Baghdad.

### CONSISTENCY WITH NATIONAL PASTORS IS MISSION-ESSENTIAL

Jobless refugees, a weakened local economy and terrorism are the perfect storm against the Church, but this is God's Church and he's had a plan to protect his Bride for centuries. We believe God has asked us "for such a time as this..." to stand shoulder to shoulder with Pastor Ara and other pastors in the Middle East. Month after month, year after year.

When you and I are consistent with our prayers, monthly financial support, and encouragement for them, we help form a faith-shield around their hearts, which gives strength and emboldens them as the under-shepherd the people need!!

Did you know IM hosts conferences and meetings designed to encourage and bless national pastors (and students in training for ministry) in the Middle East, India, and the Philippines? To find out more visit [indigenousministries.org](http://indigenousministries.org).

Your prayers and support for Pastor Ara and other pastors through our Global Church Planting Initiative is truly a blessing. God is using you to change lives! With an urgent need for \$24,000 this year, your help is vital for these pastors.

**Donate now to the Global Church Planting Initiative at [indigenousministries.org](http://indigenousministries.org).**

1 TIMOTHY 5:17 "LET THE ELDERS WHO RULE WELL BE CONSIDERED WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOR, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO LABOR IN PREACHING AND TEACHING."

## Baghdad Pastor Shares (from page 2)

*We supported them by providing food packages, materials for school, and gifts for students, beside presenting the values of the Kingdom of God by the team of AWANA.*

**What have been some of your biggest challenges?** *In the first two years, I faced challenges concerning applying the vision and mission in the midst of difficult context. But in September 2014 the Lord opened a new and important door for His ministry; visiting the refugee camps outside Baghdad, first starting with Muslim Shia, then Sunni, Yazidis, and Roman Catholic, till now. However, the challenges changed, like the situation in Iraq quickly.*

*After the dramatic changes in Iraq at the end of the last year\*\*\*, and the protesters being in the roads and squares, the congregation of the church decided to present a positive response. We visited the Liberty square in the center of Baghdad, brought food to the protesters, and prayed for the people and the country in the midst of the square. The big challenge that we are facing right now is the unstable situation in Iraq with the protesting people, who are asking for the Justice, Equality and Rights.*

**How did your training prepare you for this ministry?** *My training in the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut for three years in intensive courses was important to me to in reshaping my opinion about the ministry, and God's mission for His church.*

*I learned that the ministry is not only the classic services that we know, which are held inside the building of the church. In fact, the real and effective ministry takes place outside the building of the church, when the people of God meet together, pray and encourage each other, learn from each other, and bring the Word of God to those far from Him. Those who don't want to or are unable to visit the church in the classic services.*

**Please share with us some of the work of the Lord that is going on in the church and through it:** *We experience the power of the Lord through several ministries; celebrations and events we hold inside and outside the building of the church such as: The Word of Life Bookshop and Cultural-Educational Center, lectures and trainings.*

*As a church, we also collaborate with relief programs, especially the program of Child Sponsorships in collaboration with **Indigenous Ministries** to support the displaced families and their children who attend Sunday School, and are learning from the Word of God. I am very pleased to see the children from the Nineveh Plain try to get Kingdom values in their life; even with difficult situations in their life.*

*Before I left Iraq to Beirut for my training in 2009, I received a promise from the Lord from Genesis 28:13-15, which was a call for me to come back to this country, to serve Him. Then, when I came and started the ministry, these verses have continued to be in front of my eyes. Especially when I am presenting lectures at universities or institutes, or am meeting with government officials or political figures.*

*In spite of our difficult context, the promise of the Lord and my calling are always leading me to serve Him, not in my own way and will, but in His Way, to fulfill His will.*

**What are some fun and relaxing activities you and the church enjoy?** *We have picnics several times per year. In addition, we have times for fun during celebrations such as; Mother's day, Father's day, special events for children or women. Aside from that, we are planning to arrange a four day picnic in Erbil, to hold the yearly conference of our church, and get some rest as a family.*

Special thanks to Pastor Ara for sharing his heart and articulating his challenges and blessings to us.

\*\* June 2014 ISIS began unleashing violence in and around the city of Mosul, formerly a thriving economic center of 2+ million people. These brutal acts were unleashed on Christians and Shia Muslims alike, creating a flood of refugees and forever changing the population and culture of Iraq. Millions were displaced, scattering through Iraq especially Kurdistan, and many, around the world.

\*\*\* 2019-2020 Iraq Protests: Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis continue to protest against the corruption in the government, lack of jobs, clean water and education. Since early 2019, more than 700 protesters have been killed and 27,000 injured. There has been little change or justice by the government.



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## Coronavirus (Cont'd from pg 1)



Meeting with Syrian Refugees

Years ago during a very difficult time in our ministry, one of the men of the church I was pastoring came behind me put his hand upon my shoulder. A big smile came across his face as he asked, "Pastor John, how are you doing?" Those words he shared with me and the memory of his hand on my shoulder resonate with me years later. *It made a difference that someone cared.*

Worldwide, millions are genuinely terrified of the Coronavirus; medical professionals continue to reassure that much information online is inaccurate.

Yet what is accurate, according to the WHO, is what another killer does each year: cardiovascular heart disease claimed 17.9 million lives in 2016, making it the #1 cause of death worldwide. Cancer, terrorism and car accidents also claim millions each year. But this virus is crippling many with fear. Why? because we can't control or stop it.

Rational or irrational fears? Depends who you talk with. Our response to the Coronavirus, however, has the potential to make us more compassionate to refugees whose fears are rational. But our compassion in potential is only existent in reality through actions.

I reminded the Syrian men of our Father's care, and that many people are praying for them. Their response? Anger? Fear? Resentment? All refugees struggle with their thoughts in these areas, but these men have worked to keep a focus on God. They also have a deep gratefulness and humility to the Lord for bringing them this far.

IM assists refugee families in Iraq through our Rapid Response Fund. Children and their families in the Child Sponsorship Program receive regular food and assistance.

- John Cook, CEO

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Guidestar/Candid has rated Indigenous Ministries Gold in 2019 for financial transparency.

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