

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation”

NESSL Appeal 2023

When the Protestant faith and mission reached Syria and Lebanon at the beginning of the 19th Century, it was during the Ottoman Empire. It was a time of despair, Famine, poverty, persecution, and violence. From the very beginning, the message of Christ was accompanied by a special focus on education and healthcare. The contribution of the Protestant mission along with the Jesuits led to a renaissance for Syrian and Lebanese society.

Today, NESSL is striving to re-live the story of the beginnings through a faithful witness, yet sadly in similar past circumstances. However, despite the economic and financial stress, the good news is that we don't have to start from scratch. This time we are equipped with established congregations all over the two countries, diaconal arms, educational institutions, and loyal partners who share with us the same vision for God's mission.

Despair is the feeling that things won't change for the better and that nothing we do will make any difference. Yet, biblical hope is more than a desire for something better. It is a certain expectation built on a deep faith in the presence of God amid suffering.

Dear partners in Christ, how can we hope for God's promise for the future if we believe he has failed us in the present? In Romans 12, Paul writes “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” He talks about many virtues: joy, hope, patience, prayer, giving, and hospitality. The only word that stands alien to those virtues is the word “Tribulation”. The reason is that “Tribulation” is the climate in which all these virtues are exercised to find their true meaning.

For the last ten years, and in our journey out of despair to hope, we were not alone. Our partners' commitment to God's mission in Syria and Lebanon, and their sincere support through the crisis made us one in re-living the story of our very beginnings.

After 11 years of war, the Syrian refugee crisis remains the world's largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. Since the conflict in Syria began in 2011, millions of people were displaced, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, Syria is torn apart, and the standard of living is set back by decades.

Lebanon, a country that was once called the Switzerland of the East, is now a country described by its president as "going to hell". After three years of an unprecedented economic collapse, the crisis is classified by the World Bank among the worst in the world since 1850.

NESSL Relief Programs in Syria and Lebanon

Update on the Living Situation in Lebanon and Syria

Lebanon: The best way to describe the situation in Lebanon is to say it is a country of war without armed violence. Officials and media talk of Lebanon becoming a "failed state". President Michel Aoun who will leave office in November without much hope for a soon presidential election warned that the state was "falling apart". For the last 9 months, Prime minister Najib Mikati and President Michel Aoun failed to reach an agreement to form a cabinet.

An agreement with the IMF, which is seen by spectators as the only way out of the financial and economic crisis, is still delayed after three years of the collapse. A GDP that was 55 billion dollars in 2018 is estimated at 20.5 in 2021, says the World Bank.

Lebanon's banks are paralyzed. People's savings have been frozen out of U.S. dollar accounts. Withdrawing dollars are permitted only in local currency applying exchange rates that erase up to 80% of its real value. Only fresh dollars coming from outside the country are accessible, yet not immediately.

Poverty rates are sky-rocketing in a country of 4.6 million plus 1.5 Syrians (refugee status and nonrefugee status), with around 80% of people classed as poor, the U.N. agency ESCWA says. Last September, more than half of families had at least one child who skipped a meal, UNICEF has said, compared with just over a third in April 2021.

The Lebanese lira lost its value against the dollar by more than 26 times (October 2019=1500LL → October 2022=40000LL), and the purchasing power of the population eroded, and they became unable to provide for their basic needs.

Besides the educational sector, one of the most damaged sectors by the crisis is healthcare. The World Health Organization has said that most hospitals are operating at 50% capacity. It says around 40% of doctors, mostly specialists, and 30% of nurses have permanently emigrated.

Dependent on imported fuel, Lebanon is facing an energy crisis. Even before the crisis, power was in short supply, including in the capital. Now, households are lucky to receive more than two hours a day. The rocketing prices of diesel oil made it impossible for people to pay for electricity coming from private sector generators.

The latest increase in the minimum wage applied by the government made it 50\$ a month. In the last ten months, the Lebanese pound lost 45% of its value against the dollar. This is while the government withdrew from almost all kinds of subsidies. Everything is dollarized in the country. Just imagine how can individuals, families, and institutions cope with such a situation.

Syria: Today, 90 percent of people in Syria live in poverty, and most are unable to make ends meet or bring food to the table, according to UNICEF. Families have had their resources depleted, with limited employment opportunities, skyrocketing prices, and a shortage of basic supplies. For most people, the current socio-economic challenges represent some of the harshest and most challenging circumstances they have faced since the beginning of the crisis 11 years ago.

- 14.6 million Syrians still in the country require humanitarian assistance, and more than 80% of the population is in acute need.
- 6.1 million Syrian children require assistance, according to UNICEF
- 12.4 million Syrians in-country don't have enough food for their basic dietary needs
- 6.6 million Syrians are registered as refugees; 5.7 million of whom are registered in neighboring countries
- 6.7 million Syrians are displaced within their own country.
- According to World Vision, more than 50% of Syrians live in extreme poverty lines less than \$1.25 a day.

- More than 90 percent of the population lives below the poverty line according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). At least 12.4 million Syrians—out of an estimated population of around 16 million—are food insecure, according to the World Food Programme (WFP), an alarming increase of 3.1 million in one year. More than 600,000 children are chronically malnourished.
- Currently, the minimum salary in Syria is 92,000 Syrian pounds (18 USD). Ironically, 1 Kg of lamb meat is 8.6 USD, and 20 liters of gasoline in the black market is 17,3 USD.
- Since 2011, the local currency has lost its value against the dollar 100 times (from 50 SP to 5000 in October 2022). Only in the last 10 months, the Syria pound has lost 40% of its value against the dollar.

Today, Syria is fragmented into several zones of local, regional, and international influence. There are the Turks, Russians, Americans, Iranians, and the local Kurds. There are no signs of a near agreement on how to solve a very complicated conflict. Syrians are no more to be blamed for not agreeing. It is no more up to them. It is totally in the hand of outside parties.

NESSL Relief Programs in Syria and Lebanon

In response to the accelerating daily worsened conditions in Syria and Lebanon, NESSL finds it mandatory to go on with its two relief programs in both countries. The below table shows how the funds coming in 2022 from our partners are being distributed to support Relief Programs:

YEAR 2022	RELIEF IN SYRIA	RELIEF IN LEBANON
Number of families	1029	261
Requested Funds	\$ 660,000.00	\$ 230,000.00
Remain Pledged Funds	\$ 83,719.50	\$ 33,719.50
Received Funds	\$ 132,107.00	\$ 75,643.43
Number of Partners	7.00	7.00
Expected Deficit	\$ (444,173.50)	\$ (120,637.07)

PARTNERS SYRIA	PARTNERS LEBANON
United Church in Sweden	United Church in Sweden
PDA	PDA
GAW	GAW
Lutheran Church in Hannover	Lutheran Church in Hannover
ACO	
	Outreach Foundation
	WCRC
UCC	UCC
Rev. Edgar McCall	

- In Lebanon, relief support is managed through bank debit cards where beneficiaries can cash them monthly from ATMs. Some partners demanded that their funds be distributed through Supermarket vouchers.
- In Syria, due to the absence of banking services, payments are handed in cash through the local relief committees.
- Every year the program in Syria is facing a shortage of funding. This usually results in reducing the monthly amount paid to beneficiaries. We are committed to the total number of families we support, and we prefer to reduce the amount over reducing the number of families. All are in dire need of help.
- An audit report will be made available for partners in February 2023.

Education and Schools

Update about the education sector in Lebanon:

Since the beginning of the school year, educational institutions, especially private ones, have been crying out for their inability to secure the cost of heating and operation, with the rise in fuel prices and long hours of power cuts, and the increase in teachers' salaries as required. The annual fees which were once 2500 USD, today are received in local currency around 300 USD.

Facts & Figures

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a report at the beginning of the year that the rate of enrollment in educational institutions

decreased from 60% in the 2020/2021 academic year to 43% in the year 2021/2022

2. Private education fears the worst if the collapse continues, due to the emigration of many teachers and students after some schools closed their doors and adopted strict policies to reduce burdens.
3. The network of Catholic schools alone, which includes 321 educational institutions and 185 thousand students, lost about nine thousand students during the past year, and 14 schools were closed.
4. The head of the Teachers Syndicate in Private Schools, Rodolphe Abboud, talks about a “bleeding” in the teaching staff, with the emigration of “a few thousand teachers” out of about 43,000 full-time and contract teachers, after the trivial value of their salaries.
5. “If we do not protect the private sector, the end of high-quality education will come to an end,” says the former Secretary General of Catholic Schools in Lebanon, Father Boutros Azar.
6. “We have never seen a similar situation before,” said Lama Al-Taweel, head of the Federation of Parents’ Committees in Private Schools, adding, “Even education, the pillar of our society, is collapsing.” Al-Taweel believes that “70 percent of parents will not be able to secure school fees for private schools, or buy books and school supplies, in addition to losing all logistical needs in homes (no electricity or internet).”
7. In the school year 2021/2022, the Ministry of Education adopted four days of in-person education, due to the fuel crisis that affects electricity cuts and the extremely high cost of transportation. More schools in the year 2022-2023 will go back to five days of attendance which will increase the burden on private schools.

NESSL formal schools in Lebanon 2021/2022

The generous pledges and contributions provided by our partners as shown in the progress financial report saved the academic year of our school on many levels.

- We were able to keep our teachers through extra payments, living support, and transportation costs.
- We were able to increase the financial aid which led to an increase in the student bodies in each school. The number of students in 2021/2022 was 7606 students

compared to 6912 students in 2020/2021. Today, our schools started with 8448 students for the year 2022/2023.

- We were able to support the schools with diesel oil which reached an extremely high price. It is an urgent need for providing electricity and heating.
- We were able to support the schools with educational and operational needs which are fully dollarized. This includes educational equipment, lab materials, educational programs, projectors, computers, maintenance contracts, and lawyers' fees.

All the above were impossible without the funds designated by our partners to lift the daily challenges and hardships of our school year.

At the beginning of 2022, similarly to all schools, we were able to raise the trivial tuition of local currency by 70%-100%, and of course after the approval of parents' committees. That raise aimed to protect the school from further financial deterioration. However, the raised tuition did not help much for the following reasons:

- Since then the Lira lost 45% of its value against the dollar.
- The government forced the school to raise the daily transport from 8,000 LL per working day to 95000 LL.
- The government raised the salaries by 1,325,000 LL to all employees including the teachers.
- The schools have to finance all the above decisions which eroded the tuition raise applied.

However, we have to celebrate the direct impact of financial aid given to needy students which resulted in more increase in the student bodies of all our schools. The below table shows the big move in the number of students.

Increasing the number of students through more financial aid to needy students will result in increasing the volume of collected tuition fees, which will lead to financial stability in the schools in the coming two years. This will help us to convince the parent committees to raise the tuition year after year until we reach full self-dependent schools.

School location	Number of Students 2021/2022	Number of Students 2022/2023	Total increase
Minyara	518	664	
Tripoli	1186	1431	
Rabieh	1029	1100	
Kab Elias	415	466	
Zahle	1165	1323	
Nababieh	1516	1560	
Saida	1777	1904	
Total	7606	8448	842

You will see in the financial progress report more details about the distribution of funds over the schools according to each donor. Also, an audit report will be presented to donors at the end of this year.

Livelihood Support for Pastors, Staff, and Schools principals

The salaries of pastors, staff, and school directors remain the most embarrassing issue in viewing the Synod budget in recent years. In the years before the financial collapse in Lebanon, the budget of the Synod did not need any support for the salaries of pastors, since some schools were able to support our budget from their annual surplus. Even during the years of war in Syria, the Synod was able to dollarize the pastors' salaries for Syrian pastors until the beginning of 2020, because the deterioration of the Lebanese pound was reasonable. This explains the importance of the schools' recovery from their financial depression to support the livelihood of the core crew of NESSL, which we are sure will happen over the next few years.

The generous grants provided by several partners in 2022 resulted in essential support for the continuity of this segment of workers in the Synod and spared the Synod the risk of losing several of them. Despite this, two young pastors left us for reasons related to their livelihood and the future of their families. Of course, our call is more important than any surrounding circumstances. Yet the pastoral call lives in history and affects differently each person according to his/her ability to resist the pressure.

Facts about the situation and funds received:

- The funds received from partners were equal to the funds requested in the appeal of 2022.
- The funds were distributed monthly exactly as it was planned: \$200 for each pastor in Lebanon. \$130 for each pastor in Syria. \$150 for each retired pastor in Lebanon. \$100 for each retired pastor in Syria. \$300 for each school principal. \$200 for each staff member.
- Monthly amounts were distributed to each person regardless of his/her seniority and years of service. In Lebanon, the office boy and general secretary received equal monthly amounts since the monthly amount is equally needed to bring food to the table of both.
- However, in 2022 the basic salaries paid in Lebanese and Syrian pounds were eroded by the deterioration of the Lira in both countries, which made these salaries shamefully insignificant (as you can read in the below tables).
- Only in the last 10 months, the Syrian pound has lost 44% of its value against the dollar (3,575 SP on 1/1/2022 → 5,150 in October 2022). Also, in the last 10 months, the Lebanese pound has lost 45% of its value against the dollar (27,500 on 1/1/2022 → 40,000 in October 2022).
- Unfortunately, nothing predicts the stability of the Lira in 2023. What is expected by economic observers in both countries is the contrary.
- It is worth noting that the end-of-service compensation and retirement pension funds for NESSL pastors are stuck in the bank and have already lost 80% of their value, and we cannot reach it at the moment.
- NESSL is already providing medical insurance to its pastors and their families, which is already fully dollarized in the market. Also, NESSL supports the schooling for the pastors' children when there are no near NESSL schools nearby their ministry location.
- Faced with this situation, which is deteriorating daily, I feel compelled to share with you the factual tables of the pastors' basic salaries in Syria and Lebanon. This table shows what those salaries have become over the past years, specifically since the collapse of the financial situation in Lebanon:

Full-Time Pastors in Ministry (Syria)						
Name	Academic Degree *	Years of Service 2022	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2020 RATE=910	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2021 RATE =3400	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2022 RATE=3575	Salary in USD as of OCT. 2022 RATE= 5000
1	A	22	670	117	113.57	81.21
2	A	40	981	168	155.62	111.27
3	A	19	770	134	106.57	76.19
4	A	26	790	153	122.92	87.89
5	B	35	0	160	152.45	109.00
6	B	14	745	130	103.40	73.93
7	B	4	475	83	80.04	57.23
8	B	10	569	100	94.05	67.25
9	B	7	513	90	87.05	62.24
10	B	4	453	83	80.04	57.23
11	B	4	453	83	80.04	57.23
12	B	0	0	79	-	-
13	B	2	0	79	77.70	55.56
14	B	2	0	83	77.70	55.56
Total			6,419	1,542	1,331	952

Full-Time Pastors in Ministry (Lebanon)						
Name	Academic Degree *	Years of Service 2022	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2020 RATE=2000	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2021 RATE=8600	Salary in USD as of 1/1/2022 RATE=27500	Salary in USD as of OCT. 2022 RATE=40000
1	B	32	2352	555	177	121.45
2	B	32	2352	545	177	121.45
3	B	37	2544	598	191	131.04
4	A	24	1901	452	144	98.89
5	A	22	1824	425	138	95.05
6	B	33	2390	564	179	123.36
7	B	38	2582	597	193	132.96
8	C	19	1997	484	151	103.71
9	B	25	2084	552	157	108.02
10	A	27	2016	499	152	104.65
11	A	25	1940	451	147	100.81
12	B	23	2007	467	152	104.18
13	B	7	1393	397	107	73.48
14	B	2	0	284	90	61.97
15	A	1	0	284	77	52.85
Total			27,382	7,154	2,231	1,534

Retired Pastors / Their Widows (Syria)					
1	2	3	4	5	6
120	16	14.94	10.68		
150	20	18.55	13.26		
185	24	22.92	16.39		
61	8	7.53	5.38		
763	99	94.53	67.59		
724	94	89.67	64.11		
Total	2,003	261	248	177	

Retired Pastors / Their Widows (Lebanon)					
1	2	3	4	5	6
1845	416	0	0		
989	225	72	49.44		
408	93	30	20.41		
337	77	25	16.85		
1920	434	140	95.99		
1863	421	135	93.14		
1843	416	134	92.16		
2226	502	162	111.29		
Total	9,586	2,168	697	479	

Academic Degrees: A (bachelor. Th) – B (Master of Divinity) – C (Doctorate and Ph.D.)

Therefore, concerning the 2023 appeal, and under the stressful living conditions described above, NESSL needs to increase the fundraising to maintain the last year's pastors' standard of living (not enhance it). This requires a 40% increase in the dollar subsidy to offset the erosion caused by the decline in the purchasing power of their salaries in local currency in 2022, and the expected deterioration in the local currency in 2023. Accordingly, I appeal to the partners to be generous in increasing the amount of last year by 27.45%. A modified amount of the requested funds will take into consideration the change in the number of pastors concerning those who left the ministry for livelihood reasons and retired pastors who passed away.

NESSL Appeal of 2023

Relief program in Syria and Lebanon 2023						
Country	Beneficiaries	Number of Payments	\$\$ Monthly amount	Admin. fees	\$\$ Funds requested	Appeal 2022 \$\$
Syria	1000 family	6	30	10%	400,000	660,000
Lebanon	300 family	12	50	10%	200,000	230,000
Total	1300 family				600,000	890,000
Schools and Students Financial Aid						
School	Number of Students year 21/22	Number of Students year 22/23	Requested Amount \$\$	60% students financial aid	20% teachers salary support	20% educational & operational costs
Saida	1777	1904	30,000	18,000	6,000	6,000
Nabatieh	1516	1560	30,000	18,000	6,000	6,000
Zahle	1165	1323	30,000	18,000	6,000	6,000
Kab Elias	415	466	20,000	12,000	4,000	4,000
Rabieh	1029	1100	20,000	12,000	4,000	4,000
Tripoli	1186	1431	30,000	18,000	6,000	6,000
Minyara	518	664	20,000	12,000	4,000	4,000
Total	7606	8448	180,000	108,000	36,000	36,000
Livelihood Support for Pastors, Staff, and Schools Principals						
Country	Number of Categories	Monthly support \$\$	Annual \$\$ Requested 2023	Annual \$\$ requested for 2022	% requested increase for 2023	% increased for each Beneficiary
Pastors LB	15	280	50,400	33,000		
Pastors SY	13	182	28,392	26,068		
Retired LB	8	210	20,160	18,000		
Retired SY	6	140	10,080	7,200		
Staff	11	280	36,960	28,800		
Principals	6	420	30,240	25,200		
Total	59	1512	176,232	138,268	27.45%	40%
Summary						
Projects	\$\$ Appeal 2023		\$\$ Appeal 2022			
Relief Syria and Lebanon	600,000		890,000			
Schools & studens F.A	180,000		94,000			
Livelihood Support	176,232		138,268			
Total	956,232		1,122,268			

Dear partners,

The annual appeal of NESSL is a people-centered one (needy families, needy students, pastors, staff, and principals). It touches the most vulnerable areas which threaten the life and ministry of our Church in this exceptional dark phase in Syria and Lebanon.

This does not mean that we don't have other needs. Also, it does not mean that our partners turned their back on those other needs. Along with those people's needs displayed in the appeal, some partners committed themselves to walk with us in some vital long-term projects that eventually will touch the congregational life and the teaching ministry of our Churches. Construction projects that started years ago continue to be supported by partners generously. Also, throughout each year, we are faced with small emergency projects here and there. Thanks to our partners who are always ready to respond to those projects.

Our protestant mission in this troubled part of the world is needed more than anytime before. Our educational mission ensures our participation in the future of our society through nurturing thousands of students according to Christian love, liberal arts, gender equality, freedom of conscience and speech, and community service. Our society is afflicted with sectarianism and tribal thinking. It is why we need a Protestant open-minded presence. 70% of our students are non-Christians. Around 50% of our students are girls. What a blessing from God given to NESSL so we have access to touch the life and educational needs of those young.

Our presence is also an ecumenical need. We have something authentic and valuable to share with our sister Christian traditional Churches. Our protestant presence by itself is a call to other Churches that Christians cannot continue to live in the past, stagnate in traditions, praise hierarchy, get used to masculinity, and silence the voice of lay people and women in the Church.

We value your presence in our midst as brothers and sisters. Together we can be salt and light to this miserable East that needs us as a "city on a mountain". As I mentioned at the beginning of this report, together we can re-live our common story of the 19th century, yet with the power of Christ's Gospel today.

Joseph



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