

We Are Present
at the border





On the 5th of March, 2016, The Orthodox Initiative, hosted a very special visit, a Leadership Delegation from the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), that included both churches' General Ministers and Presidents, and several UCC Conference Ministers and Disciples Regional Ministers. The delegation is part of the current Middle East Initiative, and also, two representatives from the United Congregational Churches of Southern Africa and one from the United Church of Canada.

The visit was part of the Global Ministries Middle East Initiative. The Global Ministries is a partnership between the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, and it has been a true partner and supporter of our work, for years.

Nowadays, we are working at the Jordanian/Syrian border, entering several informal Syrian refugee camps, so we invited our guests to come with us and join us in the distribution of detergent parcels and women dignity and hygiene kits. This was a great opportunity to share the reality of our work on the ground, and to update them on the refugee crisis and current situation in Jordan. We believe in sharing experiences, where each party benefits by learning from each other.

Even though we have faced other crisis since 2003, this is the most worrying and heavy we have witnessed. Jordan has received more than 1,800,000 of refugees since 2011, and this influx of population is stressing the resources of the country.

According to official statistics, only the 20% of the refugee population is living in an official camp. The Zaatari and Azraq camps are hosting this segment of population, but the big majority, an 80% of them are living scattered around the country.

With this premise in mind, we travelled to a camp located in the Sabha and Subaiha area, which is 38 km north from Al Mafraq city (49 km from Amman), in northern Badia, only about 2km from the Syrian border. The camp is located near a farm, and is inhabited by around 45 families of Syrian refugees. The majority of the them come from the Syrian Reef (country side), the Damascus Reef, in Hama and Alghouta Al Sharkia, these areas became very active conflict zones.



The settlement is located in a desert area, only accessible through rocky and unpaved roads. Climate conditions in the desert are extremely harsh. Temperatures range from 122°F in the summer to get below zero in winter. Winds are aggressive and often the area is buffeted by sandstorms, putting the refugees in a truly vulnerable situation.

Dryness, dust and scarcity in water supplies affect the living conditions of the settlers in this area, contributing to high levels of dehydration as well as other diseases like hypothermia, flu or pneumonia in the winter, and risk of infections during the summer.



According to our statistics, in this camp live no less than 45 families, over 200 people including adults and children. Therefore, we prepare the distribution accordingly. Our visit to the camp was programmed in order to distribute hygiene and detergent packs, which were tailored around the refugee needs. We used the feedback obtained during our last assessment, when we gathered information from our focused group conversations. This is what we call conscious aid, avoiding redundancy and targeting specific needs by including our beneficiaries in the conversation. After years of experience in the field, we work with the best distributors and prices, as we never stop researching to be able to deliver efficiently, and making the best out of our funds. Our priority is to preserve and enhance the dignity of the most vulnerable, and to excel in our work, to honor our donors.

During this visit we distributed 45 Detergent packs, and 45 Women dignity kits.

WOMEN DIGNITY KITS

ITEMS	QUANTITY PER PARCEL
Hair removal	2
Body Lotion 500ml	2
Deodorant stick	2
Hair brush	1
Sanitary napkins	4
Cotton pad	1

DETERGENT PARCELS

ITEMS	QUANTITY PER PARCEL
Laundry detergent	4
Hand soap 125g	4
Diaper Hair Shampoo 200ml	4
Dishwashing liquid 500ml	4
Sponge pack	6
Bleach 1l	4
Cleaning gloves	4
Hygiene gel 500ml	2
Tissues 200	4
Toilet paper	6

The population in this camp, has bedouin origins. They are in their majority farmers, and after being placed in the Zaatari camp in the beginning of their exodus, they could not adapt to a life in a fenced camp, and decided to move to live near a farm, where they could have their own privacy, and occasionally work in what they know, in exchange of some resources, like water and electricity. These refugees are extremely welcoming, and disciplined. There is a natural order in the way they receive us every time, from the adults to the children. Before the distribution, they patiently line up, and wait calmly for their parcel. The same happens with the children, and this is a collective effort of the community, and the education that with very little resources, they are instilling in them.



The whole team, and the delegation helped in the distribution, which helps fostering the relationship with the community, extending our hand and letting them open their trust at their own pace.















The delegation had the opportunity to see the living conditions of the camp. While walking around the camp, it is easy to see the living conditions, the infrastructure and resources are poor and barely enough to cover basic needs.







In addition to the distribution, we always make sure to bring something for the children. We believe that providing them with non-relief items, like candy, toys and art supplies, helps them reconnect with their childhood, and it is as important as direct urgent relief.

This time, we brought something different, sunglasses for kids. Along with our personal campaign for bringing color to the desert, this was a fun and useful item, and soon we could see little faces popping up with colored sunglasses everywhere we looked.







The small school tent, was donated by Save The Children. It is run by a refugee young woman, who teaches math and arabic. There are no desks, no chairs, but the courage and will to give these kids something to hold onto for their future.

They enthusiastically invited us inside. As we entered in the tiny classroom, the children were ready to play peekaboo with us. We played, we sang songs and we laughed, once again feeling there is so much love and innocence in them, we must help preserve it.



time to reflect



The day ended in our offices, after having a session of talks and a presentation of the work we have been doing in different areas of Jordan. We had time to exchange impressions, ask questions, reflect and ultimately grow, together. We are grateful for the friends we make along the way, and the partnership that is cemented every time we meet.



A young boy with dark hair and a wide smile is the central focus, wearing a white button-down shirt over a blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is a dry, open landscape with sparse vegetation and a few other children playing in the distance under a clear blue sky.

WE ARE PRESENT

by the Orthodox Initiative