

Postwar rebuilding is a sign of Christian hope

Aleppo Center of Christian Activities and Services

Introduction

Christian spirituality is not defined by the fact that Christians experience persecution, but rather in the way in which they endure it and choose to respond to it. This is the story of the first Presbyterian Church to be organized in Syria in 1853 in Aleppo. Since then, the witness of this Church never faded. It was able to receive Christians fleeing what is now Turkey during the Ottoman massacres in 1915. This little flock witnessed to Christ through its schools and all kinds of diaconal ministries. However, in 2012 the old sanctuary of the Church was totally destroyed by radical Islamist groups. Nevertheless, they believe that the faith they kept through the years will keep them in their land to continue telling the story of Jesus.

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) is the largest Protestant denomination within the Protestant/Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon. NESSL finds its roots in the American/European mission which goes back to the early 19th Century. NESSL includes 38 congregations spread over the area of Syria and Lebanon.

The Syrian war has destroyed the infrastructure of the state and Society. The exchanged violence between the different parties killed hundreds of thousands of people from all backgrounds. Many Islamist militias like ISIS and the Nusra Front, besides 40 different groups with Islamist Jihadi flavor, threatened to turn Syria into a religious Caliphate taking advantage of the demands of people for a more democratic country. This threat made the Christian community the most vulnerable one since Christians long for a civil state where all citizens can live equally in a peaceful Syria.

Aleppo city, where the NESSL has a lively congregation, had a big share of the destruction and damage. The Church building in Aleppo had been destroyed to the ground in 2012 through two consecutive explosions by Islamist militias since they were controlling the old sector of Aleppo where the Church was located. The first explosion dated June 2012 destroyed the first half of the building, and the second dated November 2012 put the sanctuary to the ground.

With the support of partners, NESSL had to move the worship activity to a new steel-structure sanctuary built on a plot of land previously owned by NESSL in the Christian

sector of Aleppo was obliged to move and build a Steel Structure sanctuary in a safer Christian sector of the city.

After Aleppo was liberated from all Islamist fighters, and relative peace prevailed in the city, Christians started to renovate and rebuild their Churches in the old city of Aleppo. However, our building needed more than renovation since it was completely destroyed. Rebuilding became a must along with other Christian Churches who decided to preserve their presence in the area.

The Protestant presence in Aleppo goes back to 1853 when our congregation was organized on the Presbyterian tradition as the first native Protestant Church in Syria.

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon resolved to re-activate its presence and ministry on the destroyed land by constructing a **Christian Activities and Services Center**.

The center will be a place for **Theological training in the Arabic language**, **Ecumenical conferences**, and a place for **Religious Dialogue**. The Center aimed to be a sign of resurrecting to a new life and ministry in Aleppo. Christians in Syria meant to stay in their homeland and need to be empowered to continue being the hands and feet of Christ.

Project:

The Center is being built at the plot where the old destroyed church at Aleppo was. The plot is at the old part of Aleppo city with an area of 1,437 m². The project is composed of three floors (underground, ground, first). The total floor built area of the building is 3,000 m². The Center can accommodate 30 people.

The underground floor is for parking, kitchen, generator room, and other facilities.

The ground floor, on which the entrance of the center is located, contains management, Dining Room, chapel, large conference hall and four meeting rooms which could be used as classes also. there is an open 400 square meters terrace on that floor.

The first and second floor is for occupants which accommodate 50 persons.

The center could be used as an activity center and/or semi-seminary teaching courses and training young people into theology in Arabic since there no such thing in Syria till now.

The work in the concrete phase has already started to finish the basement floor.

We appeal to you in supporting this pioneering project which will strengthen the impact of the Christians in Aleppo, one of the most affected areas by the Syrian war.

Rev. Joseph Kassab,

General Secretary of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon



P.O.Box 70890 Antelias - Lebanon

Tel: +00961 (0)4 525030 **Fax:** +00961 (0)4 411184

Email: jkassab@synod-sl.org

Web: www.synod-sl.org