

## **Middle East Overtures for the PCUSA General Assembly**

After reading and consideration, the Session of our church recently concurred with two overtures prepared for the General Assembly regarding the crisis in the middle east, especially in Syria and Labanon. The vote was unanimous and the result was taken up by the Presbytery of Los Ranchos at their last meeting. The vote there was also unanimous and Los Ranchos joined with five other presbyteries in supporting these proposals to the Assembly which is scheduled to meet in Portland, Oregon in June. Below is the text of these overtures. If you would like to see the background and rational, please ask in the church office.

### **UPHOLDING PEOPLES AND PARTNERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN THE UNITED STATES**

The Presbytery of Los Ranchos overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly to adopt these actions:

The 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly:

Recognizes the importance of the continued presence of Christians and churches in the Middle East;

Affirms and encourages the Christian presence in the area through strengthened ties between the PCUSA and the historic and reformed churches of the region;

Calls for expanded partnership relationships between PCUSA congregations and those of our partner churches in the Middle East;

Directs the Stated Clerk and other appropriate staff to foster consultation and joint action with partner churches of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to address ways of increasing the respect and protection of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East;

Directs the Stated Clerk and all appropriate staff to consult with our Christian partners in the Middle East to determine how religiously-based radical thought and action in the region can best be thwarted. This should include seeking insights from our partners about appropriate and inappropriate policies and actions in the region of the United States and other governments.

Calls upon the United States Government, the United Nations and other international organizations to support and fund activities of: peace-building; institutions nurturing civil society; and promoting strategies for broadly inclusive economic development –all essential for long-term stability in the Middle East.

Calls on agencies of the General Assembly, Mid-Councils, church sessions and pastors of the PCUSA to seek ways for Muslims, Christians, Jews and persons beyond the Abrahamic family to work collaboratively in resisting bigotry and extremist thought and actions in communities across the United States – and especially those groups and individuals cloaking themselves in religious language and ideology.

(For the full rational and background, please contact the church office)

## ADDRESSING THE MIDDLE EAST REFUGEE CRISIS

The Presbytery of Los Ranchos overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly to:

1) Respond to the ancient biblical directive to provide for the stranger and the sojourner by directing appropriate PCUSA agencies, offices and staff (e.g., the Stated Clerk, the Office of Immigration Issues, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Office of Public Witness, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance) to provide leadership for the whole PCUSA in diligently advocating for and seeking to improve matters related to United States Government refugee resettlement policies and related issues. This would include, but not be limited to advocacy for:

- a. A shortened overseas processing period – one measured in months not years – for refugees approved for admission to the United States. Beyond security checks, the process should include an expanded plan for reuniting families in this country;
- b. Increased federal funding to support necessary services for an expanded number of refugees – especially the most vulnerable;
- c. For admitting refugees as lawful permanent residents to increase their personal security and to insure that they not slip through administrative gaps in the immigration system.

2) Appropriate PCUSA entities and staff are directed to urge the United States Government and other member nations of the United Nations to honor and increase their funding to support humanitarian agencies, international refugee camps, and direct financial support which is often indispensable for internally displaced families in countries such as Iraq and Syria, and the multitude of other people, forced by fear and violence, to flee their national boundaries. This would include, but not be limited to:

a. Integration by the United States Refugee Resettlement Office of all services provided for refugees such as medical assistance, job training, job placements, micro enterprise loans, and mental health services in addition to living expenses. Such integration would promote charting the actual cost of refugee resettlement and give guidance for realistic funding based on the number of refugees admitted per year;

b. Establishment of trauma services for refugee children. Trauma is epidemic in refugee camps, and funding is inadequate to address needs. Also, since only about half of refugee children live in refugee camps, similar assistance should be made available through appropriate service agencies and responsible governmental entities where refugees live outside of camps;

c. Dramatically increased support by governments, religious entities, private organizations, and individuals for direct refugee services.

3) Joining denominational entities and staff named above, PCUSA presbyteries, sessions, and pastors should encourage congregations to host, co-sponsor, and/or support refugee families.

- a. Churches can provide basic support such as clothing, housing, furniture and food.

- b. Churches can provide a social connection for refugees to assist their acclimation to the community – including a welcoming voice for Muslims.