

JOURNEYS OF PROMISE



“Treat the foreigner as you would a local...
Love him like one of your own.”

Leviticus 19:33-34


Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND

Youth & Children's Project
2016/17

EXPLANATION OF LOCATIONS



National Evangelical Synod
of Syria & Lebanon

National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL)

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) has 21 congregations in Syria and 19 in Lebanon, with its headquarters in Beirut. These Presbyterian communities face many challenges at this time. In Lebanon the churches are facing the overwhelming burden of supporting the displaced and refugees, where one in every three people are Syrian refugees. The Lebanese Government provides no benefits for them, they are not allowed to work and the children are not permitted entrance into Lebanese schools.

NESSL, supported by partner churches around the world, are working tirelessly to provide emergency relief effort for the many refugees, both Christian and Muslim, according to their needs. They have been able to provide relief supplies of food, clothing, medicines, and fuel for heating and cooking. The next phase of their efforts is to renovate and furnish an old school building, to set up a primary school for 200 Syrian children based on the Syrian curriculum, and employ Syrian teachers from the refugee camp. This is what the money raised by the project will support.



OpenDoors
Serving persecuted Christians worldwide

Open Doors

Open Doors exists to strengthen the church in the most hostile places. In over 50 countries, Open Doors is supplying Bibles, training church leaders, delivering Bible-based literacy programmes and supporting Christians who suffer for their faith. In the UK and Ireland Open Doors works to raise awareness of global persecution, mobilising prayer, support and action among Christians.

Syria is the 'largest displacement crisis globally' according to the UN. More than half the Syrian population have left their homes; 7.6 million are internally displaced within the country, and 4 million are refugees outside it. Before the war there were some 1.8 million Christians in Syria; now best estimates stand at between 700,000 and 800,000. Most of Syria's refugees have ended up in refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan.

Open Doors is involved in helping its local partners in offering food packages and other needed material to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Besides this material support, the beneficiaries also receive spiritual support and Christian literature. They are also funding school projects for Syrian refugee children. Open Doors is also raising prayer support for believers in difficult situations and prayer in general for Lebanon. The money raised by the project will provide Bibles and equip those who are working with children and young people in the refugee camps as they spread the gospel message.

JOURNEYS OF PROMISE

Introduction for leaders

This year's General Assembly Fit for Purpose theme is 'A Community of Global Concern.' Throughout the 2016/17 church year, therefore, there will be lots of opportunities – through events and resources - for members of PCI to be envisioned and equipped for engagement in God's global mission. In particular, members of all ages will be encouraged, first and foremost, to listen to what God has to say about His heart for the nations and His mission in the world and, as part of that, to learn from and share with our brothers and sisters in the world church.

One way that you can engage in this – and encourage your congregation's children and young people to do so as well – is through this year's Youth and Children's Project, 'Journeys of Promise.' This highlights a very real and current global concern, the refugee crisis in the Middle-East and the journeys being made by so many who have been promised 'something' better.

Stories of 'journeys of promise' being undertaken by refugees are nothing new, of course. Within the Old Testament, for example, we read of the Exodus journey undertaken by the Israelites as they fled from the brutal conditions imposed by an Egyptian Pharaoh. Then, centuries later, at the beginning of the New Testament, we read of Mary and Joseph fleeing with their young son, Jesus, this time to Egypt, to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod. Perhaps as we watch scenes from the likes of Syria unfold on our TV screens or see children huddled together on boats or in camps, old stories that we are, perhaps, too familiar with, might take on new life and meaning.

The Israelites, of course, made it to the land that had been promised to them by God and, because of God's faithfulness, care and provision, they were commanded to treat others as God had treated them. This wasn't a command simply for those who were rescued from Egypt, though. God's expectation that His people would remain a Community of Global Concern carried through to the New Testament and therefore it equally applies to us today. As Christ's words in Matthew 25 remind us, we are still expected to welcome the stranger, invite them in and clothe them.

Our care for the stranger, the marginalised and dispossessed is, however, to be more than the offering of hand-outs, safe passage and places of refuge. Rather, just as the Israelites were expected to do, we are to offer the outsider – wherever they come from - a welcome into the family of God and point them to the one who promises eternal hope as we journey through this life. This pack provides you and your congregation's children and young people the opportunity to both explore how this is being done through PCI and its partners in the Middle-East and to engage in this work through your prayers and giving in order that many who have taken journeys of despair might embark upon 'Journeys of Promise.'

You will need:

- One copy of the map template for each child (page 13)
- Balloon game resources – balloons, markers, way to keep the time
- What would you pack? resources – large sheet of paper and marker
- Bibles
- Copy of DVD to play overview video

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

Give each child a copy of the map at the back of this booklet (page 13)

Explain to the children that you are going to visit each of the areas on the map and learn something there about each part of the Project.

WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

Explain: In Journeys of Promise, we are going to look at what it is like to live as a refugee and hear stories of people who have left their own countries to start their lives again in a foreign land. A refugee camp is a place where these people can settle and build a new, temporary home. A camp is designed very quickly in order to provide shelter for a short space of time. Typically, the refugees live in tents or huts made out of materials that are locally available like cloth or plastic. The stories on the next few pages will let you see what it is like for families to have to flee their homes and settle in refugee camps in places like Lebanon.

Play one of the two following games.

Choose which depending on the age and ability of the children in your group.

Game 1. Balloon Game

Have 5 balloons of different colours, each marked with one of the words: food, home, school, freedom, language. Ensure there is a way of keeping time.

Explain: Each balloon has written on it one of the things that refugees might need to think about. Make sure the children understand what the words are.

Have a child stand in the middle of the room. Throw the balloons into the air one at a time. The aim of the game is for the child to keep all the balloons in the air. Time each child for 30 seconds.

Ask: How difficult was it to keep all the balloons in the air? Explain that refugees can find it very difficult when they are scared and in a foreign place to deal with all that will help keep their families safe.

Say: We are going to think about some of the ways that we can help refugees but also what we can learn from them about God through what they have experienced.





Game 2. What would you pack?

Tell the children to think of a time when they had to pack to leave their house, for example to go on holiday. Ask them what sort of things do they pack? How long did it take to get ready to leave? Write these on a large sheet of paper so that everyone can see.

Now have the children imagine that they only have 10 minutes to get out of their house because they are scared, they cannot use the phone and their lives are in danger. What sorts of things would they make sure that they could take with them? Make another list and compare it to the first.

Explain that this is what it is like for a lot of refugees leaving their homes and their countries in fear. They have very little time to leave and they can only take what they can carry when they are walking and travelling a long way by foot.

What do you think that would be like?

Say: Sometimes we hear words describing people who have had to leave their countries because of war or hunger or for economic reasons and we do not understand what they mean. We are going to think about refugees and economic migrants in Journeys of Promise.

Explain: A refugee is someone who is pushed out of their country for some reason. For example, this could be war and fighting or persecution (being treated really badly, hurt, imprisoned) because of what they believe or famine (not having enough food). An economic migrant is someone who leaves their country willing to go to another because of the pull of a promise of a better life, more money, better jobs and education.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Bible focus

Say: We all know the story of the Good Samaritan really well but sometimes it is good to look again at a familiar story in the light of a current situation.

When we think of our neighbours, we think of the people who live in the house next door or who live in our street and they are our neighbours. But Jesus used this story to tell us something different about how we are to see our neighbours.

Let's read the story – even though we may know it really well. Read Luke 10:29-37.

LUKE 10:29-37

So he [a teacher of the Law] said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

To answer this question, Jesus said, "A man was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes and beat him. Then they left him lying there, almost dead.

It happened that a Jewish priest was going down the road. When the priest saw the man, he walked by on the other side of the road. Next, a Levite came there. He went over and looked at the man. Then he walked by on the other side of the road.

Then a Samaritan travelling down the road came to where the hurt man was lying. He saw the man and felt very sorry for him. The Samaritan went to him and poured olive oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. He put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn. At the inn, the Samaritan took care of him.

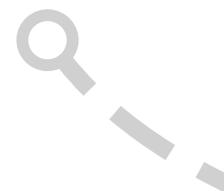
The next day, the Samaritan brought out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. The Samaritan said, "Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again".

Then Jesus said, "Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who helped him".

Jesus said to him, "Then go and do the same thing."

(Children's International Version)



Ask:

- What do you think the teacher of the law was hoping Jesus might say?
- Why do you think the Samaritan helped when the others did not?
- When we look at the world, who are our neighbours?

Explain: The Jews and the Samaritans lived in neighbouring lands but they really did not like each other. That is what makes this story that Jesus told even more shocking.

Years before the Samaritans had decided that they wanted their own king and so they rejected the king that God had appointed to lead His people. The Samaritans also worshipped other gods as well as the one true God. They worshipped God in a place that was not Jerusalem which is where the Jews believed was the central place to worship God. And there were some other reasons but it's important to know that they really did not get on!

So for Jesus to use the example of a Samaritan to help the Jewish man that had been beaten up would have been very surprising and shocking for the Jewish listeners to hear. They would not have liked it at all and it would have challenged their views on how to live their lives for God in the world.

There are some people in our world who may live lives that we do not agree with. They may worship other gods, be involved in other religions or worship no god at all. But the Bible tells us that these people are our neighbours and that God wants us to care for them. There are also people in our world who worship our God but have been removed from their homes and have had to go on journeys where they have been beaten and have lost everything that they own. They are also our neighbours and need our help.

This Project is going to help us understand more about some of our neighbours in the world and how we can help them as God has commanded us to but also how we can learn from them about our faith and what it means to be a follower of Jesus in today's world.



The next few pages outline the stories of three different people in our world who have been on a journey that is probably unfamiliar to many of us. Their journeys so far have been long and scary, and they aren't over yet. Each story is told from a different angle to give us a wider view of what it is like to be a refugee.

You may want to explore all of the stories in your lesson, but if you don't have time to tell all three you can focus specifically on one. The video will cover the three stories briefly.

Show introductory video on DVD.



MIRIAM'S STORY: LEBANON (AREA 1)

NESSL Involvement

Miriam is nine, and before the war began she lived with her family in a village in central Syria. Her father was a successful businessman running two shops, and she and her family lived a comfortable life with a nice house and a car, they had everything they needed. Her mum was a teacher in the local school where Miriam was a pupil. She loved school and especially spending time with her friends.

Then the war started and their village was caught up in the fighting. Suddenly there were soldiers and tanks, and without any warning they had to put as many of their possessions as they could gather up into their car and flee for their lives. It was a long and frightening journey and they had very little food. With great relief they eventually made it over the border into Lebanon.

Miriam's family don't know if they will ever be able to return home. Thankfully they were able to bring a little money with them. They were able to rent a plot of land in the refugee camp in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and a relief agency gave them a tent which they share with another family. But before long, their money ran out, and in winter it gets very cold. In Lebanon the government does not allow her parents to work and so her dad had become downhearted and quite sick, and was very worried. The public schools in Lebanon cannot deal with the number of Syrian children, and so many go onto the streets begging for sandwiches but it is dangerous and they get into trouble. Miriam stayed in the camp and tried to help her mother to care for her younger brother and sister, but she got bored easily missing school and especially her friends, always wondering where they might be.

Ask: What must it be like for Miriam? How do you think she feels on a daily basis?

Say: Miriam is unable to go to school, her dad is sick and she is missing her friends. She must feel very scared, lonely, worried and confused. But that's not the end of the story; let's read on



Then came some better news! There was a Church near to the refugee camp that had been giving them food, clothing, fuel for heating and gas for cooking, and was helping to pay their rent. They also provided medicine for Miriam's dad. One day they sent a parcel for Miriam containing a school uniform, some stationery and a school bag! The news was that they were starting a school especially for Syrian refugee children. On the first day, Miriam was nervous but there was another feeling she had not known for a long time; it was excitement as the bus arrived at the camp to collect the children. They began the day singing songs and hearing stories from the Bible that Miriam had never heard before. She made some new friends and at the end of the day returned to the camp to tell her family all about the day.

The school found out that Miriam's Mum was a trained teacher and some weeks later she was invited to become a teacher at the school, although Miriam was glad that her Mum was not teaching her class! Recently her Mum said that there was something about the singing in the church that she really liked, and that perhaps she would go along to one of their services and take Miriam with her.

Life is still very difficult for Miriam and her family, and they wonder when they might ever be able to leave the camp and, better still, return home. Yet with all the help they are receiving, and not least because Miriam is back at school, there is fresh hope in their hearts.

Ask: How do you think Miriam felt when she found out she could go to school?

Say: It is so important for children who have had to flee from violence to another country that they have some sort of normality. Sometimes, we take school for granted because we go every day! But imagine if you couldn't ever go again – staying at home all day would eventually get pretty boring! NESSL are building a school within a refugee camp in Syria for children like Miriam to go to. They have all been on a long, hard journey and so it is important to give them something to focus on.



Bekaa Valley is a place in Lebanon that has become home for a large number of people from Syria who have fled from war and violence. There aren't enough houses for them to live in, so they have found shelter in tents made out of oilcloths, pieces of plastic, canvas and timber. Hundreds of them now make up a large camp where many refugees have settled. Bekaa Valley is known for its cold winters and gets lots of snow, work isn't easy to find and so the people who live there don't have much money.

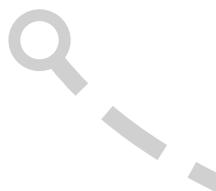
Achmed, 13, lives in the camp in Bekaa Valley with his parents and younger siblings. They used to live in Aleppo, a city in Syria, but when the war broke out there was too much fighting and so they had to flee to Lebanon. His dad, Abud, had a good job in Syria, but the only work he could find in Lebanon was unloading vegetables at the local market. Shortly after they arrived, he fell and broke his leg in two places which left him unable to work. His mum, Fatima, is also unable to work for health reasons. This meant the family had no way of earning money and so couldn't afford to pay the 100 US dollar rent for the land their tent is built on, never mind the essentials they needed to live.

Ask: If your mum/dad/carer wasn't able to work and had no money to live on, how would you feel? What would you do?

It fell to Achmed to help his family. There is no school in Bekaa Valley for the children to go to, and so he began to work as a car mechanic, earning 1 US dollar a day. This was the only income the family had - a lot lower than the 10 US dollars Abud earned working at the market, but it was something.

The family were also able to turn to a local church for help. Open Doors, a Christian organisation, supports partner churches as they reach out to the refugees in Bekaa Valley. The church was able to provide them with mattresses, food and fuel which would help them through the cold winter. The church is continuing to help this family, and others, during this time of uncertainty. They welcome the refugees into the church and pray with them. They continue to provide food and mattresses to those who need them, and some members of the congregation visit the refugees in their tents and provide education for their children who can't go to school, thus showing God's love to those who need it.

Say: Achmed was able to help his family by working all day to earn some money. There are lots of families like Achmed's who don't have anything. Thankfully, Open Doors is able to support local churches as they reach out and help those families. They are welcoming the refugees and taking care of them because they are followers of Jesus.





Open Doors is a charity that provides support and training for Christians around the world in places where it is difficult to be a Christian. They are helping refugees in the camps in Lebanon by supporting local partners, but they are also distributing Bibles.

In 2013, Open Doors distributed more than 50,000 Bibles and Christian books in Syria, and recently a huge shipment of 15,000 illustrated Youth Bibles arrived in Syria and found their way to Christians all over the country. The people don't only need answers to their physical needs, but also their spiritual needs. Many of the people in Syria are Muslims, and people of many faiths are questioning their religion because of the violence. The Christian Church is helping these people in the midst of all the violence and because of that they want to learn about God.

Ghalib is a key Bible distributor in Syria. Along with some fellow Christians, Ghalib went to Damascus in order to receive a 16-ton shipment which was to be divided between Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. One of the recipients told Ghalib that he had told others about the Bible and had received requests for more from churches all over the country!

Distribution is not always easy. On the journey, Ghalib and his team have to pass checkpoint after checkpoint to get the Bibles to their destination. The soldiers at the checkpoints ask a lot of questions and there is a risk of kidnappers as they are carrying such a large number of books and money. Even though it is dangerous work, the distributors are seeing the results of their efforts.

Most of the children and young people who are receiving the Bibles have gone through one sort of a trauma or another. But in reading their Bibles they are able to see the power of God. One child, after reading the story of Jesus calming the storm, said "Only God can calm a storm. No one else. And had Jesus not been God, He wouldn't have been able to do all these miracles". The Bibles are allowing the children to see that Jesus is their protector, as the one who can calm the storm that has shaken their lives, the one who can make good of the bad situation they are in. In reading their Bibles they can see that Jesus loves them.



MEMORY VERSE

In the Bible, there is a lot of teaching about caring for others, especially those in most need. God wants us to share His love with all people all over the earth. One of the ways that we can do this is through our actions. God wants us to show people who He is by how we act as His followers and share through our words. Then all people will have the opportunity to understand more of who God is and to be in a relationship with Him.

The memory verse for Journeys of Promise is from Leviticus 19:33-34 and it says:

**“Treat the foreigner as you would a local...
Love him like one of your own.”**

For leaders: There are lots of ways that you can teach this verse, either with a single Sunday school class or with all the children together. If you are working with small children do not necessarily expect them to be able to learn the whole verse though they may try – and succeed! However make sure that they understand the meaning of it and what God is asking them to do. Ways to learn the verse may include: have the words written out for the children to read and then slowly cover different parts up; read the words in normal voice, then quiet voice, then loud voice, to help learn through repetition, etc.

Explain: When Jesus lived on earth, he spent 3 years teaching His disciples lots of things about how to live and how to follow God. Jesus’ message was one of love and of caring for others. He wanted his disciples to care for those who no-one else bothered with. He taught them that showing love to these people would show who God was. When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan which we looked at earlier, it was also about showing love and caring for someone who needed help. This also showed others what God expects of His followers and makes them stand out as living differently to everyone else.

Ask: This verse tells us to love the foreigner as one of our own, but what does that look like? How should we respond to refugees who have had to leave Syria and are living in camps? In recent months, some of these refugees have come to live in the island of Ireland, how can we respond to them?

For leaders: Decide as a group what you can do to raise some money to support the Project. If you need some ideas, see the inside back cover of this booklet for a list.

Pray: To finish the session, spend a couple of minutes praying for the children, young people and adults who are affected by the issues highlighted in this Project. Ask the children what they would pray for and either encourage them to pray short prayers out loud or use their ideas to form a prayer to say for them.

Thank you in advance for all your support for Journeys of Promise!

AREA MAP



REFUGEE CAMP

FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Family Fun Day • Coffee morning • Pancake Night • Talent Auction • Concert • Barn Dance • Craft Fair • Sponsored Sing • Victorian Tea Party • Car Boot Sale • Cake Sale • Ice-Cream Sundaes • Table Quiz • Art Competition • Indian Themed night • Bag Packing • Movie Night • Curry Night • Car Wash • Treasure Hunt • Sponsored Walk • Church Picnic • Church Breakfast • Smartie Tubes • Christmas Card Delivery • Christmas Gift Wrapping • Barbeque • Sponsored Go Without any Electronic Devices for a week • Wedding Dress Show • Helping Hands (parents pay children for jobs at home) • Sports' Day • Sell bedding plants and flowers • Cupcake Sunday • Collect Coppers

CHILDREN AND MONEY

Often in church, we either exclude children from giving money or we do not teach them what it means. One of the important parts of the Youth and Children's Project is the raising of money to help support the locations that we are highlighting. We want to encourage this as part of the whole teaching of the Project.

We want children to make formative connections between giving and following Jesus.

In the Gospels, Jesus says a great deal about money and possessions. Not that He was obsessed by money itself. He was obsessed by the abundant life that He promised to His followers. Jesus knew that how we handle money can either help or hinder us in finding that life.

Ensure that you explain as part of the Project and the fundraising, the importance of our role of giving out of our plenty to help resource God's work in the world.

For more information on this subject check out

http://www.givinggrace.org/classic/preaching/children_P6.html

PCI video on the Grace of Giving at

vimeo.com/presbyterianireland/graceisgiving

PERSONAL STORIES



Uel Marrs
Global Mission Secretary



National Evangelical Synod
of Syria & Lebanon

I had the opportunity to visit NESSL's headquarters in Lebanon in October 2015. Since the war began in Syria more than five years ago, a number of the churches in Syria have been destroyed or damaged, and some ministers and their congregations have had no option but to flee, either displaced in their own country or

fleeing as refugees to neighbouring countries or further afield.

Dr Mary Mikhael, Director of NESSL's relief programme, says that it is estimated some 34,000 babies had been born in refugee camps by 2015, and while the need is far beyond what we imagine we must do something to ensure that a whole generation of children do not grow up without an education.

I found it very moving to discover that while the church in Syria and Lebanon has so few resources, so many are committed to giving generously and sacrificially to the relief work. Like the Macedonian Churches, "out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty, well up in rich generosity" 2 Corinthians 8v2. It is a privilege for PCI to be able to share with our partners by contributing to the relief effort and not least to this educational initiative for Syrian children.



Mark Moorhead
Children's and Family
Worker, Hamilton Road
Presbyterian Church



OpenDoors
Serving persecuted Christians worldwide

We hear a lot about the 'situation' in the Middle East, but it's important that we don't get so caught up in the facts and figures that we forget about the real people behind the news stories.

That's why, in partnership with Open Doors, a number of people from our Church are travelling to Lebanon to spend some time working with Syrian refugees. Amongst other things, we'll be spending time meeting with Christians who are supporting refugees in all sorts of ways, and we will be helping to run a Gospel-centred Children's Club, which will be attended by young Syrian refugees who are Muslim.

I visited Lebanon in April in preparation for our trip, along with a few other leaders, to meet with some of the children we will be working with, to see where we will be working in order to plan appropriately and to gain some understanding of the situation that these children have come from.

Visiting a culture that is so far removed from my own was daunting but, as I met with the boys and girls, I was reminded that, whilst they might have different experiences (in the case of these children, some very bad experiences), children are the same all over the world. It was a joy to meet them, to work alongside them and to teach them about Jesus. The Gospel is the best hope for this part of the world and the Church in Lebanon is working hard to spread the Good News. I am very much looking forward to returning with our team and hope that we may be used, even in a little way, to show boys and girls that Jesus is the only way.



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