

# Letter of Hope from Syria to the European National Communities

To our greatest joy, we received a very encouraging and hopeful letter from CLC Syria written in the spirit of Gospel, a testimony of spiritual resurrection, determination and fraternity.

## Letter to the Euro-Team from Syria

When I started trying to gather my thoughts to write this letter, the first thing that came to my mind was the exchange of letters between churches to share the conditions and concerns that has been the style of the Church since the Apostolic era. Therefore, if you want to hear and know how Christians in Syria are living in general, as well as the Syrian members of the Christian Life Community in particular, this is a desire at the core of the gospel and in the tradition and history of the church from the earliest days. The church is constituted by many communities that make up one body.

Of course, you have heard bad news about Syria. Indeed, there is a lot. Christians, just like all Syrians, have been hurt by war in their hearts. It has displaced them from their homes, threatened their lives and made them taste the cruelty of the siege. We lost friends, family members, many of us lost their home, job, fallen sick and witnessed the departure of our beloved brothers and sisters.

The Syrian Christians have carried the cross of the war with the rest of the Syrians. The war has made the challenge of emigration and the bleeding of the Christian presence in the East even more ferocious. Christians have faced difficult questions. Is Syria a homeland for them and for the Gospel? How do Christians present their commitment in wartime? How do they make good news (Gospel) spread against the fire of the bad news? How can they answer with love in the face of the infection of the hatred, violence and condemnation? Are Christians looking for the image of God in one another, or are they going to war with violence and racism?

Anyone who sees media coverage of the events in Syria will see only the tragedy, and the presentation of suffering usually reflects only foreign political interests. Unfortunately, the whole media coverage about Syria is so distorted that in itself it is a cause for despair. It always frames the Syrian tragedy in a way that can be invested in politically, and therefore the tragedy continues as long as this investment continues. But is tragedy our only testimony? Do the Syrians, in general, and Christians, in particular, have just suffering and bad news to tell the world about?

In my view, Syrians are presenting a challenging testimony to the world, whether in Syria or in the country of asylum. The Syrians find themselves in a completely new and strange context with difficulties they have never encountered before. These difficulties impose on them the requirement to exceed themselves and to surmount these harsh circumstances. Amongst the poverty, displacement and violence inside Syria, the humiliation, alienation and the requirements of integration outside our homeland, Syrians sometimes cannot find the internal determination and the will to live the life that God breathed into us. One can imagine the challenges that a person faces when the land slumps beneath him and he loses his sense of stability and clinging roots.

As for the testimony of the Church, especially the Jesuit Order and the Relief Agency for Refugees (JRS), difficulties and tribulations became also a true source of compassion and relief for Christians and non-Christians. JRS has made a tremendous effort to help thousands of lost and displaced people, provide them with food, emergency medical care, and ultimately, a minimum sense of dignity. The Jesuit Order has offered a martyr, the Jesuit Father Frans Van der Lugt, and the kidnapped Jesuit father, Paolo Dall'Oglio. Both of them gave their evangelical testimony from the perspective of their vision. Father Paolo was abducted in circumstances in which he himself was trying to free kidnapped people. To this day, his fate is still unknown. As for Father Frans, he stayed with the besieged people in the Old city of Homs, he shared their bread, and walked the path of pain and the cross with them including

beatings and humiliation. The path ended with his martyrdom. In addition to Father Frans and Father Paolo, the monastic also presented the efforts of the Jesuits residing in Syria, their fatigue and their great work compared to their numbers which isn't huge.

What about our community (CVX)? Our community has experienced a tremendous renewal of spirit during the war. Our groups have showed the ability to renew itself and to formulate a vision of leadership, despite great difficulties, including the emigration of many members of the old community, companions, and administrators. Despite the lack of an active Jesuit role in the formation and accompaniment of the group, some of the old members have contributed to the revival of the group. They are currently experiencing an effective reception of the evangelical spirit, with thirst for spiritual experience, and openness to Syrian society.

At the reception level, a group of mature lay people in Homs initiated project of spiritual meetings for university graduates. Created by the martyred Father Frans Van der Lugt, these meetings are a group activity dedicated to offer a simple spiritual life for young people, teaching the art of meditation, and listening to one another. Some of the Muslims also participated, and this resulted in a lively reception among the group because of the young people's desire to continue their spiritual path within a listening and supportive group. This led to a growth in the numbers of teams and members, especially in Homs and Damascus.

As for the group of in the city of Aleppo, since the siege, our members started to care about the elderly who were left alone in the war. Gradually this initiative expanded and received material and moral support from churches and non-governmental organizations. This evangelical spirit renewed the spiritual enthusiasm in CVX Aleppo. Many elderly people found new friends and sons, a new meaning of friendship, and an opportunity for joy and life.

For years in Damascus, a group of members committed themselves to visit to the Children's Hospital to help create a spirit of love, hope, and joy for children who struggle with cancer. In their apostolic visits, members lived deep and profound spiritual experiences.

CVX members in Damascus are now planning various apostolic initiatives. Some of them have already begun to get realised; for example, the initiative to provide lessons for homeless children to learn the message of the Gospel with the elderly, and the initiative to give moral support to families affected by war, displacement, and loss through repeated visits and friendly relations.

The Syrian Cross is harsh and overwhelming. Yes, but we are witnessing as a Christian community that if we carry it according to Christ's vision we will rediscover our spirituality and hope, and we always meet on this path people like Simon of Cyrene, who reach out their hands with participation and support. The World Community, represented by its National Committees in the Executive Council, has played an active role of solidarity, which has generated significant moral support and financial contribution that has helped the community in its mission and its high-cost activities amidst the circumstances of the war.

So the most important good news that we say to you is that the loving God can be witnessed regardless of the dark reality, if we say yes to His presence within us and in the darkest moments and this God is the absolute God that we must address in our hearts and thoughts and in our relations. In the presence of this God, we ask him to help us not to be biased towards the rich or the poor, to the healthy or the sick, but to profess that everything depends on his greatest glory and on the good willing souls.

**United by prayer**

**Abed Al Rayes (General Coordinator of the Christian Life Community in Syria)**

Quelle <http://clc-cvx.eu/>