

# PRAYER & PRAISE

*Quarterly news from Middle East Media*

ISSUE 102 **OCTOBER 2018**

**In this issue:**

- THE REFUGE** - Empowering New Church, New Believers
- BLOSSOMS** - Showing God's love to Sudanese refugees in North Africa
- A VISIT TO NORTH AFRICA** - Reporting on a supporter trip

**"In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly."**

PSALM 5:3

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Prayer & Praise 102! Our field teams are full of vision and hope for the Middle East and North Africa - it's inspiring to speak to them and I hope you are encouraged by the articles in this newsletter.

**This edition of Prayer & Praise is full of inspirational stories from the Middle East, some are hard to hear, while others are exciting and encouraging. It's important to us that you, our supporters, know that the cultures and situations that we work in are sometimes appalling, therefore it is even more vital that we shine God's light on them.**

In our article about Sudanese refugees, you'll hear the story of Aliyah, who is being helped by our *Blossoms* project. She went to start a new life in North Africa, not realising the racism and discrimination she would experience. It was vital for her, and many other refugees, to work through the damage and hurt that they have experienced in their lives. We are incredibly humbled and thankful to have the opportunity to support them.

I was recently interviewing our International Director, Wayne Larson, about one of our new projects *The Refuge*. He said that "*Community is everything in the Gulf*" and when you read the article about how new believers are treated by their families, you will have a clearer picture about why it becomes paramount for them to be integrated successfully into Christian communities.

***The Refuge is part of a larger vision, which is to strengthen and provide a firm foundation for the developing Gulf church by building strong and mature believers.*** They will be equipped to reach their own people and communities with the message of hope that they have in Jesus.

We also hear from Marion Osgood as she reports on a recent supporter trip, where she and a small team went to visit some of our work in North Africa. **Have you ever thought of going over to North Africa and visiting our field teams?** Why not read the article and follow the steps to plan your trip in 2019.

In all of these things, I hope that you will take a moment to thank God for all that He is, and has done across the Gulf and North Africa through the work of MEM.

Thank you for your continuing financial support and fervent prayers for our work.

In Him,



James Baldock  
Communications Manager  
[comms@mem.org](mailto:comms@mem.org)



# Do you shop online?

Did you know that you can fundraise for MEM, simply through shopping online? By using easyfundraising, major retailers donate a percentage of each sale to MEM and it doesn't cost you anymore than what you would have already paid for your shopping.

To learn more and sign up, please visit our page:

[easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/mem](https://easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/mem)



# *The Refuge*

Empowering New Church, New Believers





**"You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word."**

- Psalm 119:114

*Imagine* you're a new believer living in the Arabian Gulf. You have deep spiritual questions about your faith, but very limited access to Christian resources. You're immature in your faith, so you share your new beliefs with people unwisely, and have to flee from your family and community. You struggle to follow Islamic practices, but know you need to in order to stay safe. **How could you continue on your discipleship journey with all of these pressures?**

Our Gulf team have identified this issue and have responded by gaining vision for a solution - *The Refuge*. A place where these new believers can go temporarily, be discipled in their new faith, equipped to go back to continue their discipleship journey in the Gulf, and have the training to acquire the wisdom to stay safe while sharing their new beliefs with others.

It is hard to comprehend the ramifications of becoming a believer (in Christ) from a Muslim background in the Gulf. Arab culture depends on family and community for identity, therefore these individuals...

...have to cope with being rejected by their families, but also have their identity completely changed from what it was before. **They are persecuted physically, emotionally, financially, and practically.** This can take many forms, but it can include a ban on being able to speak to family members, losing their inheritance, and having their educational certificates taken away so they cannot find employment.

In the worst cases, a family member can kill them and it is considered an honour killing, with the family member not being prosecuted. In other situations, these individuals are taken to a psychiatric hospital, to be kept there as long as their family wants. Becoming a Christian in the Gulf can have an immense effect on every aspect of the individual's life.

**These stresses can cause, at the very least, confusion about their identity, doubts about faith and their decision, rejection from family and community, and incredible pressure to convert back to Islam from all sides.**

*(continued on page 6.)*

"Community is everything in the Gulf - when they follow Jesus, their close family can reject them totally or could accept, but ignore them. I know a guy when he became a believer, everyone would ignore him; when he sat down for a meal everyone would stand up and leave. They would tolerate him living in the house, but they saw him as an infidel, he wasn't allowed to eat with the family. They didn't do anything against him, but they didn't want to corrupt themselves, so he wasn't allowed to take part in family activities. A part of the vision for The Refuge is that individuals will be able to go for a few weeks, or 3 months, or even as long as 6 months, be supported, grow in their walk, be enriched to come back and live successfully in a culture like this. And Lord willing, able to reach their family and communities with the message of Jesus."

- Wayne Larson, International Director.

(cont.)

It was very important for *The Refuge* to be a place that would train these new believers from the Gulf to make wise decisions in the future, and most importantly, continue on in their faith with the ability to face these challenges. With this in mind, MEM's Gulf team identified a country, close to the Gulf region, which is friendly towards Christianity and has the infrastructure to establish a center where this could take place.

As well as providing a safe place for discipleship, our Gulf team believes that this is only *one aspect of a greater vision*. Our hope is that this center will be a place where believers from a Muslim background will be trained in media to reach their own people and also organise outreach media camps for children, teens, and young adults from the Gulf.

**"Our vision is to create a place where everyone called to serve in this tough field in our Lord's Kingdom can use their gifts and talents productively. No matter where they are from, with the right servant heart, people can partner with us." - Leina, Gulf Director.**



IMAGE: Dasha Rosato / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

We are only in the early stages of establishing this center, with many prayers that still need to be answered when it comes to funding, and the practicalities of building such a place. We have, however, seen God working through these initial stages. Specifically, in the country where the center will be based. A Christian denomination have offered incredible support, with specialist individuals such as engineers and lawyers donating their time, or offering it at a severely reduced rate.

**To help meet the spiritual, psychological, legal, and career needs of New Church individuals, we will focus on holistically equipping them.**

In pioneering this new venture, we have seen other organisations, that also work in the region, partnering with us as they see the immense need that has to be met. We believe that as *The Refuge* is established, robust strength will be added to churches across the Gulf, as new-believers will be equipped to stay the course and bring the message of Jesus to their own communities.

Although we have seen provision in the beginning stages of this project, there is still much that is needed. Would you join with us in prayer, and pray through the points in the right hand column?

# PRAYER POINTS

- Please pray for Leina and our Gulf team as they plan and manage this significant project.
- Thank God for all of the lives that will be saved, disciplined, and enriched through the operation of this new initiative.
- We currently have a shortfall of £218,296 in funding to be able to purchase the land. Please believe, and pray with us that this need will be met in the coming 5 months.
- Pray for our partners in this foreign land where *The Refuge* will be based. Pray for favor with the government, local officials, and church leaders.

## YOUR PRAYER POINTS

What are you praying and believing for after reading this story? Write your own prayer points below.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# Blossoms

## Showing God's love to Sudanese refugees in North Africa

In North Africa, refugees are often blamed for many societal problems, with increasing animosity being shown towards them. Many NGOs are serving the needs of Syrian refugees, as a response to the recent civil war in Syria. However, Sudanese refugees have been left neglected for years and are currently the most under-served migrant group.

Our North Africa team identified the inequality in serving refugees, and have since focused our project Blossoms to serve the inspirational women of the Sudanese refugee community in North Africa.

These Sudanese women have left a traumatic life behind them, looking for a new life in a foreign country. They arrive and find that people reject them, blame them, and abuse them, which compounds the original trauma. This horrific ordeal results in severe psychological, emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical distress.

As a part of Blossoms, we run workshops for these women that focus on processing psychological pressures, working through negative thoughts and emotions due to violence, and affirming human rights as a tool to equip them in facing violence and stigma.

IMAGE: Claudioidri/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM





As a way to teach these lifeskills, our teams use drama therapy, lectures, and creative arts. We have found that by using different techniques, it allows these vulnerable women to be able to express their inner feelings, find healing, and learn effectively.

**"I always feel sick, tired and unable to do anything. I don't know why this is, but when I come to the Blossoms workshops I feel active and energetic. In one session we talked about the symptoms of suppressing feelings, and I realised that my sadness is the reason for the way I feel physically." - Fiza\***

These stories are not unique across the Sudanese refugee community in North Africa. Our hope is that these women will feel the love and hope of God through these workshops, and the support that our field team can offer. Both Fiza\* and Aliyah\* have been empowered, encouraged, and found healing through Blossoms.

Please pray with us for these brave Sudanese women. Pray that our Blossoms project would continue, and grow to help more women across North Africa.

*\*Names changed for security reasons.*

***"On my first day in this country I took public transport. A man started insulting me because I am a Sudanese refugee. I raised my voice trying to defend myself. At that point, many of the passengers yelled at me and they kicked me out of the vehicle, while calling me 'black'. Since this incident I feel fear and am unable to defend myself."***

*- Aliyah\**



IMAGE: Kertu/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# A Visit to North Africa

*By Marion Osgood, June 2018.*

Barely twenty-four hours after we had first met at Heathrow – and our party of six were stuck in a lift together! It was a good bonding exercise, and it also introduced us to the incredible skill and creativity of our hosts! When once they'd rescued us, we spent time learning how this skill and creativity enable high quality animations and drama films to be produced, on subjects vital to people's everyday lives.

We toured their facilities, and were inspired by their passion and commitment as we watched the various departments at work. We were impressed also with the bravery with which education on 'difficult' issues is covered in their material: domestic and child abuse, gender issues, refugee camps, AIDS, FGM, human trafficking... As an example we were shown a simple but powerful animation illustrating childhood trauma, and demonstrating the need for healing, both spiritually and psychologically.

And as well as production, the staff are involved in training. Covering all aspects of film production, the training courses are increasingly popular, and are even taken up by some of those outside the Christian community.

As a team, we were deeply challenged by what we had just seen and heard. Jessica Davidson, one of our number, spoke for us all: **"They have made me realise I need to up my game. I need to be giving God more. I need to be praying and praising God more. [They have] also shown me the importance of the work that is happening through MEM and I need to ensure that I am supporting that work in any way I can."**

Day two promised something of a break: we were joining the tourist trail for a while, in order to see the 'sights'. As we jostled alongside Japanese and Americans, and many others from across the affluent world, we shared their excitement as we queued in the desert heat...

IMAGE: Rawpixel.com/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



... to experience historic buildings we had previously only seen in pictures. But in a way I felt sorry for our fellow travelers – they were not experiencing the real country, or getting to know the modern-day inhabitants – as opposed to the long-buried ones.

On our final day came perhaps our greatest privilege – an opportunity to interact with some of the local Christian community, which as an ethnic group has survived in this area for hundreds of years. First we visited some of their ancient and beautiful churches – not what we are used to perhaps, but we found them intimate and welcoming. There were always those on the door to greet us, and usher us in to where we could sit quietly.

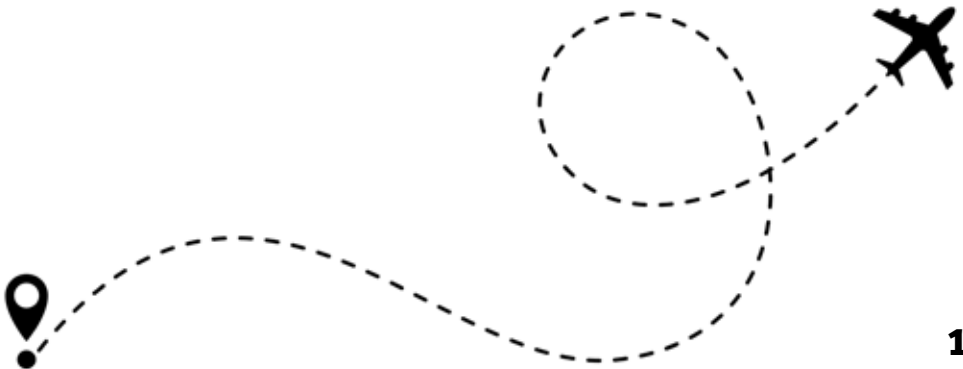
In the poorest parts of the world the minority Christian community often takes on the humblest and dirtiest work. Here was no exception, and we found ourselves in the area where the Christians collect and sort the city's rubbish. But we were also taken to see a vast modern church they had built themselves – the simplest of designs, but seating 1000s, and full several times a week. This was an awe-inspiring sight – a fitting climax to our trip. Jessica again:

**"Listening to the faith Christians out there have in Jesus is an extremely uplifting experience. Their love for God is an inspiration and one that will live with me forever."**

## *Could you join us next year?*

We have an exciting opportunity for you to visit North Africa in March 2019. You will visit our offices, meet some of our field teams and be shown how life changing animations are developed. In addition, there will be time to explore local culture and cuisine, as well as visit some of the magnificent historical sights.

For more information, or to book in, e-mail Jolita Paton ([jolita@mem.org](mailto:jolita@mem.org)).



## Thank You

Thousands of lives have been touched by the work of MEM across the Middle East and North Africa this year. None of this would be possible without your prayers and financial support.

### *Sowing seeds of transformation*

MEM UK/EU  
Unit 142, 23 King St, Cambridge CB1 1AH, UK  
[comms@mem.org](mailto:comms@mem.org)  
Registered UK Charity No. 271373

MEM USA  
PO Box 4949, Wheaton IL 60189-4949, USA  
[director.usa@mem.org](mailto:director.usa@mem.org)

*If you would like to subscribe, unsubscribe or change the way you hear from us, please contact Simon at [simon@mem.org](mailto:simon@mem.org).*

Middle East Media is a Christian charity using creative media to share God's justice, compassion & hope with the people of the Middle East in culturally relevant ways.



middle east  
**media**