



AUSTRALIA

**Langham**  
PARTNERSHIP

## eNews June 2016



Dr Riad Kassis, International Director of Langham Scholars, arrives in Australia **this week** with his wife Izdahar and daughter Trivina (pictured above). They live in Lebanon, within sight of the Syrian border and live daily with the effects of the war in Syria. Here are some excerpts of a report Riad recently wrote for the Lausanne Movement:

## The church in the Middle East

### There are hard realities for those from conflict areas

**Psychological shock:** For many years these churches were at peace, enjoying relative privileges. Christians were flourishing as a community in Syria and Iraq—they were well-educated, and held good positions in business, education, and government. Suddenly everything has been turned upside down in just a few years. When meeting Syrian and Iraqi refugees, one can see that the shock is still there, even after four or five years; they cannot comprehend what is happening.

**Displacement:** In the city of Homs, in the middle of Syria, which was repeatedly bombarded, the worst hit area was the Christian district. The Presbyterian Church in Homs, for example, was one of the strongest in Syria, but 80-90% of the Christians in Homs have been displaced. A few are now returning, but most homes and many churches have been destroyed.

**Migration:** Although no one has exact numbers, some 400,000-500,000 Christians have migrated from Syria in the past four years, many of them forced to do so. Not many will be returning. Christians formed 9-10% of the Syrian population before the war.

**Terrorism:** Christians are facing the atrocities not only of the Islamic State (IS) but also some 45 different terrorist groups in Syria, including some like Al-Nusra Front that are linked with Al-Qaida. Ever since 2011 in Syria, it was clear that there were terrorist groups seeking to take over and create an Islamic state. The actions of these groups also affect Muslims and the infrastructure of society more broadly, as well as Christians, but Christians are affected more. IS is doing this intentionally to control Christian areas, and in the future to eliminate the Christian areas entirely.

[Many] Christian adults and children among Syrian refugees have gone through traumas that need addressing.

### Churches responses

Churches and theological programs inside Syria and in Lebanon were initially taken by surprise. They were focused more on evangelism. They were not prepared to deal with persecution or oppression and did not know how to respond. The church is catching up rapidly. At least five church networks in Syria are very involved with humanitarian aid to both Christians and non-Christians in their areas. This kind of social action is becoming a priority. Caring for people of other faiths was not a priority before, but now evangelism and social action are going hand in hand. Most churches are now reaching out and helping the displaced, the poor, and those impacted by war with aid and education services.

### Theological Reflection

They are also starting to think more seriously, developing a theology of persecution—how to stand in persecution and a stance on resistance. Arab Christians were pacifist, especially in Syria and Iraq, never carrying arms even to defend themselves and their property. Some say they should have defended themselves.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are now huge issues for the whole region. As these issues surface, the church is responding. A Forum for Evangelical Thought in the Arab World, run by Langham Scholars Ministry in partnership with the Middle East Association for Theological Education (MEATE), has brought together theologians and pastors from Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Sudan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria twice in the last two years.

To learn more about our ministry visit [langham.org](http://langham.org)

PO Box 530  
Springwood NSW 2777 Australia

Ph: +61 (0)2 4751 9036  
Email [Australia@langham.org](mailto:Australia@langham.org)

*Equipping a new generation of Bible teachers*

## Openness to the Gospel

As churches in Syria and Iraq start to be engaged with the non-Christian community in deeds of love and compassion, stories are emerging every week of conversions inside Syria and Iraq. War has forced the church to engage with Muslims on their doorstep needing care. The church has had a wakeup call to engage with the Muslim community. Furthermore, churches in Syria have started to experience a unity that never existed before, even beyond the evangelical churches. This is giving them strength in numbers, in vision, and in encouraging one another to reach out.

Furthermore, IS atrocities inevitably have a deep impact on Muslims. Many Muslims are supporting the aspirations of IS, whether they say it in public or in private. They are disillusioned with secular governments and feel it is time to restore the glories of the past. This thinking encourages extremism and terrorism. It affects mainly poorly educated Sunni Muslims, both young and old. On the other hand, many moderate Muslims are saying that this is not the Islam they believe in. Quite a number of them come to Christ when the gospel is presented to them.

## Ministry among refugees

The refugee crisis is huge in Lebanon. There are an estimated 1.4 to 1.8 million refugees—more than in Jordan or Turkey. They are not confined to camps, but are everywhere. They bring economic and social problems to an already fragile country. Among the refugees there are many who are supportive of IS and other radical groups. Every week people are arrested by the Lebanese Army Intelligence for smuggling arms or money or giving other support.

Many churches in Lebanon are very much engaged with the refugees, offering humanitarian aid (medicine, food, organizing schools for children of refugees). There are 400,000 Syrian refugee children, but the Lebanese school system can take care of only 150,000 of them. The Baptist church in one city has a school for 300, while the Presbyterian Church in West Beqaa Valley is opening a school this year.

The church is taking the opportunity to reach out with the message of the gospel and Muslims are coming to faith. In the last two to three years, Lebanese and Syrian pastors say they have seen more Muslims come to faith in Christ than in their whole lives, mainly among Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

In general, they are coming to existing churches, but in some cases there are Muslim Background Believer (MBB) churches in the area. For example, some Lebanese churches have a separate service for the Syrian refugees. In one church, 80% of the refugee congregation are converts who have now been baptized.

## God at work

In the midst of suffering and darkness, God is working in his sovereignty. There is a new spirit of Christian unity inside Syria and Iraq. Egyptian Copts are praying for Assyrian Iraqi Christians in the region (which they hardly ever did before). The churches are thinking about how not just to survive, but to thrive, and to make a contribution in the region...

## To learn more, come to hear Riad while we have him in Australia!

Riad and family will be visiting Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and some regional centres in NSW and Victoria.

**Please register NOW – visit our website or phone 02 4751 9036**

---

## Upcoming Langham Preaching Events

Where countries are considered sensitive for security concerns, the region is mentioned rather than the country.

June 19-25	Zambia, South Africa	July 10-16	Sri Lanka, Thailand, Zambia, South Africa
June 26- July 2	South Asia (2), Zimbabwe (2)	July 17-23	Vanuatu, Nigeria, Congo, Swaziland
July 3-9	Peru, Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia	<b>Please pray for these upcoming events</b>	

---

## Please pray for Riad's visit to Australia

We would really appreciate your prayers for Riad's visit to Australia – that people will take the opportunity to hear him and his family speak and that many more people will learn about and come to support Langham Partnership.

---

## Langham Australia CEO Gilleen Smiley writes...

*It is a privilege to have the Kassis family with us in late June/ early July, sharing their personal experiences of living on the Syrian border as well as exploring the ways in which we can support our brothers and sisters in the Church under pressure. I look forward to seeing you at the events closest to you.*

*Plans are also underway for the inaugural John Stott Memorial Lecture, to be delivered by Chris Wright in September – in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Our vision is for this lecture series to become the voice of the Majority World church speaking into the Australian Church, through visiting Langham Scholars. Prior to that, we are planning to have a Langham dinner in Perth (WA), so if you're from that part of the world, please save Friday 12 August in your diary!*



Your gift matters  
Your generosity multiplies biblical  
preachers and teachers worldwide

Donate now  
at [langham.org](http://langham.org)

Equipping a new generation of Bible teachers