



Lebanon



Officially known as the Lebanese Republic, the country of Lebanon lies in the Middle East. It covers an area that is slightly larger than the state of Delaware. Its population is just over five times that of Delaware's. The capital city of Lebanon is Beirut.



The beautiful hills of Lebanon.
Photo courtesy of PMS Arlington, VA

Lebanon is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the Middle East. Just over half of the Lebanese people are Muslim (about 54%); almost 41% identify themselves as Christian—Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Greek

Catholics, and other Christian denominations. There are smaller numbers of Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Mormons.

The Christian faith was introduced very early in history when a monk named Maron established a monastery at the foot of Mt. Lebanon in the late 4th and early 5th century AD. The monks who learned the faith from him and then spread it throughout this region called themselves Maronites; the name has remained to distinguish these faithful as Christians loyal to the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Father.

The Christian population is declining in Lebanon; studies list two possible reasons: 1) immigration of Christians to other countries and 2) high birth rate of Lebanese Muslims.

Lebanon is a country that has been plagued by war throughout its history, most recently by a long civil war that led to Freedom House downgrading its status from "politically free" to "partially free". Freedom House is a US based non-partisan group that assesses every country's political freedoms and civil liberties.

A Helping Hand in Lebanon

Right now one of the largest problems facing the country of Lebanon is the influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq. These people are fleeing their own countries in great numbers to escape war and violence; it is estimated that there are currently over 1.5 million Syrian and a half million Iraqi refugees desperate for help entering Syria. They are met by a population who already gave homes to at least a half million refugees from the Arab-Israeli conflicts. The refugee situation has become a crisis.

Sister Antoinette Assaf of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd Sisters runs a Social Service Outreach Center and Medical Dispensary in Beirut. She was recently interviewed by Michael Mele, a volunteer for the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in the Diocese of Arlington, VA. “We are in crisis,” Sister Antoinette said. “Our area was already poor and mostly Shiite (a major Muslim sect in Lebanon). Now we have 12,000 to 13,000 refugees and more arrive every day. The cost of living here was low, but has been driven up by demand. Our poor are the ones who suffer most and our middle class is now slipping to poor. This causes tensions.”



The Sisters and their shelter strive to be an oasis of peace in an otherwise troubled landscape. They are witnesses to God’s love in the midst of poverty, distrust, and uncertainty. The staff welcomes and treats people of all ethnic groups and religions equally.

Just recently a 14-year-old boy who was being treated for meningitis at their clinic, died. His mother was so grateful for the care

he received that she gave Sister a cross with her son’s picture on it. “The boy and his family are Muslim so this moved us very deeply,” said Sister. “His mother confided that we were the only ones who treated her son with love and compassion,” she added.

When Sister is asked about herself, she brushes those questions aside. “I just wanted to give my life to Jesus, to children -- I love children -- and to those from broken families or no families at all.”

Because of the prayers and sacrifices from Missionary Childhood Association members



Mothers and children wait for care from the Sisters

worldwide, Sister Antoinette continues to care for all of God’s children as they arrive at her doorstep. At last report, MCA members sent \$5,000 to support Sister’s work. The children of Lebanon received a total of \$141,500 to help build schools, care for orphans, and fund health clinics.

Lebanese MCA members sacrificed \$13,500 so that missionaries in other parts of the mission world can continue their evangelizing ministry with children.