



**“Growing Together in Partnership in Times of Crisis”**

**Second NESSL & Partners’ Consultation**

**Dhour Choueir Evangelical Conference Center – Lebanon**

**10 – 17 April 2016**

*“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”* I Cor. 12:12

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria & Lebanon (NESSL) held its Second Consultation with its Partners in North America and Europe from 10 to 13 April 2016, in **Dhour Choueir Evangelical Conference Center – Lebanon**, over the plight of NESSL’s Churches in Syria, as the 5<sup>th</sup> year of internal war in Syria continues.

During these days we had the opportunity to review the findings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Consultation held two years ago, and evaluate what has been done, in all fields, since then. We also had the privilege & blessings of meeting the pastors of the Synod churches in Syria, who took the risks of crossing fighting zones and dangerous roads to join us from Qamishli, Aleppo, Mhardeh, Fairouzeh, Homs, Lattakia, Damascus and relate – first hand – the stories of their congregations under siege, fire, shelling, and dire need. After the Consultation, on April 14, we visited two refugee schools in Lebanon run by NESSL; and, on April 15 – 17, some of the Europeans and American partners visited Synod churches in Syria, and met with the congregations there.

Even in the midst of crisis we remain one body, united in Christ and affirm as one body our commitment to remain united in our commitment to respond to the ongoing crisis in Syria, which is in fact, a crisis that affects the entire globe and requires response from the body which is God’s global church.

**We affirm that the crisis is large and multidimensional in scope, and the burden and challenges are many. In listening to the pastors living in this context, we recognize that we are on sacred ground as they make themselves vulnerable, in an open and honest way, with the wrestling that is taking place theologically.**

Therefore it was necessary that we embark on topics such as:

Spiritual, ethical, physical, psychological needs.

Violence and its application. Can it be just, as in self-defense?

Interfaith encounters and dialogue, and making space for them and the relationships that will form out of them.

**We affirm that we are in a boat in the midst of a storm, but that Jesus is there in our midst and gives us purpose:**

To meet physical needs of those affected and to respond to those needs as partners called upon by NESSL in their assessment and discernment of the needs;

To make relief work more effective and sustainable;

To provide hope in a seemingly hopeless situation



To share information together in an informal network, understanding that to set up a formal system will require capacity and administration.

**We affirm that the church continues to reform and transform as new revelations of purpose are opened before us in the midst of suffering as we journey together.**

All of the insights that the churches' stories of endurance and witness provide, will continue to re-shape the identity of NESSL as they go forward into crisis and beyond as they recover from crisis. It is important to acknowledge that this is the role of the church. God has a purpose for us here and now.

In five years, we have moved from just being drawn along with the flood, into who we are as church, reconstructing our identity.

**We affirm the depth and breadth and height and width of the commitment and calling of pastors, elders and lay people who are finding new dimensions in their mission and vocation in the church.**

Each year the context has required new duties in pastoral and other ministries. What is required of us is to figure out how to do this work as we re-read the scriptures, seeking new direction. This shall certainly guide the perspective about how the church is to be present.

**We affirm as partners from the west that the way ahead is not straightforward: coming from the outside we have to learn and exercise discernment.**

We may leave with a new idea of how to engage. We hear clearly what is going on, but don't know clearly how to respond. We accept in humility that we do not have all the answers, but need to sit with our brothers and sisters in their situation and engage in the discussion.

**We affirm that rather than becoming weary, we have gained strength and are resolved in our commitment to the churches of NESSL in their plight, as we share in their stories of faith and faithfulness. These stories renew and empower and inspire us.**

As partners from the west, in humility we admit that we do not have the experience and understanding needed of the context to advise, but need to listen and to learn from the living epistle that is the church in the Middle East.

**We commend and laud the faithful pastors, elders and lay people who have stayed in a difficult situation as exemplified in their conviction when they state that Jesus has us here for a reason. We affirm with gratitude and thanksgiving the journeying together of this one body. We are here together, learning together, to wrestle together about the crises in our individual contexts.**

This togetherness, righteously put to effect, must inspire revival to our congregations as we realize we do not make this journey alone.



Therefore, we commit together

To network more intentionally in sharing stories, prayers, needs, outcomes and achievements.

To witness against all kinds of violence, to work for peace and justice in all contexts.

To interfaith dialogue and encounters in the hope of building deeper and stronger relationships, both institutionally and among individuals and churches.

To being a bridge that can be crossed to reconciliation.

To continue our presence and sharing of resources for God's work through NESSL .

To continue supporting relief work among the internally displaced in Syria as well as refugees in Lebanon.

To continue advocating the Christian presence in Syria and Lebanon.

To pray unceasingly.

Together as one body – one Lord, one baptism, one communion – it is our duty to bear witness to the world. The church in times of crisis gives witness to the church in comfort, and indeed to everyone. We will not be defined by the crisis, but by Christ.

***Partners participating in the consultation***

***The Outreach Foundation***

***Presbyterian Church USA***

***United Church of Sweden***

***Church of Scotland***

***Presbyterian Church of Ireland***

***ACO***

***Reformed Church in Germany***

***Evangelical Church of Middle Germany (EKM)***

***EMW***

***GZB***

***WCRC***

***Dan mission***

***National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon***