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Ireland

Spring 2019

teartimes

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There's something rather wonderful about God's economy. He uses the weakest to achieve great things: he multiplies our efforts beyond our wildest dreams.

It takes only two or three of us to meet and agree in prayer (Matthew 18:20) – and something shifts in the heavenly realms.

Because, as Ephesians 3:20 says, he 'is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us'.

For me, that's the message that rings out, loud and clear, throughout this spring edition of *Tear Times*.

The suffering continues in the refugee camps in Lebanon (see pages 4–6) – but the local church is stepping up and gathering strength as it responds to Christ's call to be 'salt and light'.

That's true in Haiti too (page 7) as God raises up his people to restore hope and create a new Haiti where everyone can thrive. Even in Yemen, gripped by the world's worst humanitarian disaster, the church is being Jesus' hands and feet, reassuring desperate people that all is not lost (page 3).

Following Jesus' example as an advocate for the last, the least and the lost, the church is speaking out for the most vulnerable, especially children, even if it means exposing uncomfortable truths (see pages 8–10).

So let's not discount ourselves – or our efforts – because he never does. He's able to make all things new (Revelation 21:5) and he invites us to be part of his renovation plan. Your prayers, campaigning and generosity are having more impact than you could ever imagine – and we are so very grateful for them.

Sharan Kelly

Sharan Kelly
 Chief Executive Officer
 Chair of Dóchas, the association of Irish non-governmental development organisations
 Chair of EU-CORD Administrative Council, a network of European Christian relief and development NGOs

TEARFUND IRELAND

We are bringing hope and demonstrating love to the most vulnerable and marginalised people – through the local church.



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Cover photo: Bekaa Valley Lebanon, families receive regular distributions of basic essentials such as food supplies, hygiene kits and nappies through Tearfund's local church partner. Credit: Tearfund

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Photo: Kairi Aun/Adobestock.com

YEMEN ON THE *BRINK*

The largest humanitarian crisis in the world today is unfolding in Yemen, yet the crisis is largely hidden from the headlines.

Yemen is on the brink of famine and its economy is facing collapse. Thousands have died in the conflict, and nearly 80 per cent of its population (22.2 million people) are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The civil war has crippled water, sanitation and health infrastructures, which has exacerbated the spread of disease. In 2017, the country hosted the largest cholera outbreak on record, with more than 1 million cases in one year.

Unemployment is at a record high: up to 70 per cent of the population has no work.

Before Christmas, we sent out an appeal to Irish church leaders asking them to help us respond to the crisis in Yemen. Thanks to generous gifts and pledges of gifts, we were able to commit to funding a food distribution and nutrition and health programme that began in December and will support more than 100 households for six months.

Please pray:

- Pray for this embattled nation – a nation on its knees. Pray that peace will come and the people of Yemen will be able to rebuild their lives.
- Ask God to help food, medicines and other provisions to get through the port at Hodeidah and be distributed to those people in most need.
- Thank God for the courage and commitment of our partner organisations, working in this hugely challenging context.





Photo: Tearfund

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE FOR REFUGEES

The church is bringing God's light to Lebanon even in places where hope is in short supply, writes Nick Park, Executive Director of Evangelical Alliance Ireland.

I will never forget people's hospitality as we squatted on the floor of their tents in the Bekaa Valley and listened to heart-rending stories of families devastated and torn apart.

And I'll never forget their responses when I asked families about their hopes and dreams for the future. A disturbing number of them simply said they had no hopes whatsoever. Their traumatic experiences had left them feeling that there was no hope left for themselves, or for their children.

But thank God that he is restoring that hope, step by patient step, and the church is rising up to fulfil its calling to bind up the broken-hearted (Isaiah 61:1).



Photo: Nick Park

Lebanon has received more than 1.5 million refugees, which works out as one refugee for every four Lebanese citizens. This crowded nation has by far the highest concentration of refugees of any country in the world.

Many of these refugees are living in cramped and insanitary conditions, and are often charged exorbitant rents. Huge numbers of refugees have fled to the Bekaa Valley from Syria and the ruined city of Aleppo.

I was privileged to be part of a team from Ireland that travelled to Lebanon recently to encourage Syrian church leaders and to see first-hand some of the projects that are being supported by Tearfund Ireland.

We had the privilege of praying with people, and distributing gifts of cakes and pastries, and balloons for the children. Many of these families rely on the food parcels distributed by Tearfund's partners for their very survival.



Photo: Tearfund

Memories of their escape from Syria are still painful. One family shared how their grandmother had been too ill to walk across the mountains to safety, and a local farmer had forced them to pay US\$ 100 to borrow a donkey to carry her across.

'THE LEBANESE CHURCH PROVIDES ONE OF THE GREATEST EXAMPLES OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE AND FORGIVENESS'

Yet, even in the darkest situations, the gospel still brings transformation.

We visited a church that is feeding thousands of refugees every month, and providing free education for hundreds of children. It was extremely moving to hear these children, who had suffered and witnessed so much evil in their short lives, singing along with a video to proclaim that Jesus is their best friend.

The church is partnering with volunteers who bring across playground equipment from North America, and construct climbing frames and play areas for the refugee children. They also have banks of washing machines and dryers, enabling those living in crowded tents to wash their clothes and maintain some semblance of dignity.

I also saw doctors and dentists from across the world giving freely of their time and skills to provide basic medical and dental care.

Steadfast faith

The church that is providing these services in the Bekaa Valley was not initially a strong church, either financially or numerically.

But their steadfast commitment to showing the love of Christ to those who are suffering has meant that attendance at their services has increased dramatically.

It is worth remembering that Lebanon was once occupied by Syria, and many Lebanese suffered great pain and loss at the hand of the Syrian armed forces. We know here in Ireland how hard it can be to move beyond historic hurts.

The Lebanese church has reached out to those who were formerly objects of fear and hate. I truly believe it provides one of the greatest examples of sacrificial love and forgiveness in modern Christian experience.



Photo: A young Syrian refugee holds her baby sister, in an informal settlement in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

In Beirut, I saw how one storefront church has multiplied home groups throughout one of the poorest parts of the city. Many of the new believers in Christ have family members associated with Islamic State, making it incredibly dangerous for them to visit the church premises.

Home groups have not only enabled the church to grow far beyond the confines of its cramped building, but also to provide a greater measure of safety and security for those at greatest risk of persecution.

Another visit to one of Tearfund's partners was truly eye-opening. In Lebanon, as in Ireland, life's everyday problems become much more challenging for families with autistic or special needs children.

Lebanese Christians have responded with one of the most innovative programmes that I have ever seen for supporting such families, as well as raising awareness of their needs in society at large. The church is now known throughout Lebanon as the foremost advocate for children with special needs and their families.

Towards the end of our visit, we were blessed to spend some precious hours in fellowship with Syrian ministers from various denominations who had come to Beirut specially to meet with us. It was humbling to listen to their stories, and to pray with them.

These church leaders have endured opposition and threats that can only be imagined by any Irish minister – yet their faith and trust in God are undiminished. The time that I spent in their presence was truly something I will remember for the rest of my life.

I trust that, in the midst of their ongoing difficulties, they will draw strength and encouragement from knowing that a group of Irish Christians cared enough to travel to the Middle East to be with them. Thank you, Tearfund, for making this happen.

Nick Park is Executive Director of the Evangelical Alliance Ireland and senior pastor of Solid Rock Church, a lively multi-cultural congregation in Drogheda.



HAITI: HOPE IS RISING

Photo: Children from Salem Baptist Port-au-Prince, Niamh Daly, Tearfund Ireland

Hope is rising and the church is on the move in Haiti, writes Marketing and Fundraising Manager Niamh Daly after a recent visit to Port-au-Prince.

Memories of the earthquake that ripped Haiti apart in January 2010 are stirred on every street corner. Buildings still carry large cracks and the pavements and roads still bear deep fissures.

Some 3 million people were affected and many are still coming to terms with their loss. When I visited Haiti recently with Open Arms Church in Newbridge, I met a girl who had just arrived at school when the quake struck – and she never went home again.

Haiti's population still have huge problems: about 84 per cent of them are living in poverty. But hope is rising in Haiti.

Hope is there in the partnership between Open Arms, Newbridge and Salem Baptist, Port-au-Prince. This was a relationship that Tearfund Ireland facilitated through our Connected Church programme after the earthquake in 2010. During our visit there late last year, the Irish team were blessed to see the fruits of their generosity and prayers and their Haitian brothers and sisters were encouraged by their visit.

Tearfund Ireland's time in Haiti has now come to an end, but many others are now running with a vision of a restored Haiti.

Hope is also alive and well in people like Marc Antoine. Marc represents a small but growing number of Haitians who were born in the US but have chosen to return to Haiti.


Marc's enthusiasm for Haiti is infectious. He is running workshops with church leaders of different denominations to write a Vision for Haiti to submit to the Haitian government: it will outline the changes the church in Haiti wants to see and the church's willingness to help make change happen.

He's also involved in building a national youth network to promote 'integral mission', encouraging the church in its calling to help restore people's relationship with one another, with God and with creation.

God is raising up the Haitian church for such a time as this – and I pray the connections we have helped forge will grow even stronger and bear rich fruit.

CAN OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERING DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

Growing concern about overseas orphanages and the potentially harmful effect of volunteering in them prompts Church and Supporters Coordinator Emma Lynch to ask: *how do we love responsibly?*

 Photo: Harrison Macharia, grew up in an orphanage in Kenya and is now campaigning to stop the use of orphanages for children in poverty. Since leaving the orphanage Harrison has been reunited with his father. Credit: Better Care Network

Spring is in the air and lots of us are already making plans for our summer holidays.

I love hearing about people who are planning to volunteer some of their time and gifts, whether in Ireland or overseas.

But I am getting increasingly concerned when I hear of volunteering in overseas orphanages or residential care institutions. Because evidence is emerging that our well-intentioned visits to help vulnerable children might be perpetuating an outdated and potentially harmful system of child care.

But surely the love we give makes a real difference to the lives of children and young people in these institutions? The situation is rather more complicated than that.

Wrong assumptions

In the Bible, the letter of James encourages Christians to express our faith in caring for the orphan and the widow (James 1:26–27) and the Christian church has a long history of making orphan care a priority.

But many of the children living in overseas orphanages are not actually orphans.

There are currently estimated to be 8 million children living in residential care institutions across the world today, mainly in developing countries. But most of these children – at least 80 per cent, according to Save the Children – have at least one living parent or family members who could care for them with the right support.

So why are so many children living in institutions?

All too often, the reason children are placed in residential care is poverty. Parents or family members may believe that an orphanage or care home will provide their children with a good

education, food and the roof over their head that they might struggle to provide.

But ongoing research by the Better Care Network has clearly shown that long-term institutional care is not in children's best interests.

Children who have grown up in institutions often have significant cognitive and developmental delays, attachment disorders and mental health issues. What's more, they often lack the social and life skills they need to become healthy functioning members of society.

The cross-sectoral coalition, Rethink Orphanages, puts it bluntly: 'Young adults leaving institutional care are more likely to become victims of trafficking, exploitation, unemployment and homelessness and are at increased risk of suicide.'

It is worth noting that caring for a child in residential care can cost up to ten times more than caring for a child in a family – so orphanages make no economic sense either.

When love starts to hurt

Sadly, and here's the crux of the matter, well-meaning support for orphanages – through donations, volunteering, tourist trips and mission work – could actually end up perpetrating a harmful cycle of children being separated unnecessarily from their families.

The fact is that our desire to support children overseas has actually led to a rise in the number of orphanages in many countries.

In the worst cases, orphanages have been established to generate income from donations and volunteers, and children have been exploited and trafficked from poor communities to pose as orphans.

So sometimes, despite the best intentions of volunteers who want to care for children still living in orphanages, their summers overseas can do more harm than good. Without a family to make them feel secure, the children are quick to form relationships with volunteers as they arrive, only to feel abandoned once again when they leave.

Tearfund Ireland has long supported programmes overseas which help reintegrate children in institutional care back into families and communities – including through our current partners in Cambodia, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

The Bible talks about God's compassion for the fatherless and his desire to place 'the solitary in families' Psalm 68:6. A good family is the setting for children to be nurtured, protected and provided for, learning valuable life skills and a sense of 'place' in the world.

We recognise that, to make orphanages a thing of the past and keep families together, there needs to be a significant shift in how individuals,

organisations, corporations and governments support development overseas, including how we volunteer our gifts and time.

That's why we at Tearfund Ireland have lobbied Irish Aid to cease its funding of orphanages overseas, and encouraged organisations to stop sending volunteers to orphanages, in favour of more helpful and sustainable alternatives.

And it's why we are now supporting The Love You Give campaign developed by ReThink Orphanages. The coalition and its campaign are working to end orphanage volunteering and to channel efforts instead towards programmes designed to prevent families being separated. Tearfund Ireland and Comhlámh will launch an Irish version of this campaign in May 2019.

To find out more about the negative effects of orphanage volunteering and to find out how to be part of the solution go to www.loveyougive.org and watch the campaign video produced by people who spent time in care in Kenya.



Photo: Peter Kamau with his son Ned. Peter was in an orphanage for his entire childhood, he is now campaigning to keep children in their families and their greater family network to avoid the problem of orphanage care. Credit: Better Care Network



ADVOCACY: A HOLY REBELLION

Photo: School Strike for Climate Change, Dublin's Stephen's Green Friday March 15th. Credit: Tearfund Ireland.

Speaking up with those on the margins and exposing uncomfortable truths is an important part of our calling as a church, says our new Advocacy and Communications Executive, Katie Lynch.

When Jesus saw glaring inequalities and injustices, he spoke out and unearthed some unpalatable truths about the deep-set flaws in our society and systems.

Proverbs 31:9 tells us that we too must 'speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice' (New Living Translation).

At Tearfund Ireland, advocacy is a vital aspect of our work. Because there's a limit to the effect we can have without seismic shifts in the underlying root causes of chronic issues such as conflict and climate change.

Advocacy is more than awareness-raising: it's about digging until you find the root of a problem, and working backwards to the presenting issue – examining the X-ray before re-setting the bone and applying the cast.

Practically, advocacy means lobbying government to change policies, implement legislation and understand research. It also means mobilising people to act and make lifestyle changes – and we believe strongly in Ireland's potential as a nation of change-makers.

Vulnerable children sit at the heart of our advocacy strategy: our vision is for a world in which every child grows up in a loving family. Our lobbying around overseas orphanages and volunteering linked to them (see previous page) is a case in point.

I am looking forward to working with other organisations and coalitions to lobby on issues such as climate change and alternative orphan care. And I'm excited about harnessing the energy of the emerging generation, enabling the young people of Ireland to express their wisdom and their hearts for justice.

Together, we can speak truth to power and bring lasting change for those who need it most.

To find out more about how you, your youth group or church can get involved in campaigning with Tearfund Ireland, email katie.lynych@tearfund.ie

FUNDRAISING

Tearfund Ireland's supporters have hosted coffee mornings and craft fairs, sung carols, managed bake sales and danced their hearts out in the last couple of months to help end poverty and they are not about to stop. Next on our list of fun activities is a cycling challenge – contact Sean in the office for more information sean.copeland@tearfund.ie



Strictly
with Tearfund Ireland



Photos: Ewa Figaszewska/Tearfund Ireland

Let's pray

APRIL 2019

EASTER AND THE MIDDLE EAST

'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.'

John 10:10

Jesus' grace and mercy are evident in the work of Tearfund Ireland partners in the Middle East.

Thank God for sending Jesus to give us life in all its fullness. Pray for safety and long-term, sustainable provision for people in the Middle East so that they may live fuller lives.

Thank God for our partners' sacrificial service for the most vulnerable people in their communities, in very challenging circumstances.

God proved his love for the world on the cross. Ask God to help you love the world as he does. Ask him to put the Middle East on your heart and inspire you to pray for places that need God's love, peace and protection.

Thank God for the hope of Jesus' resurrection. Pray for Christians in the Middle East to have safe opportunities and the courage to share Jesus' incredible story of salvation.

MAY 2019

YEMEN

'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.'

2 Corinthians 5:19

More than three years of conflict have left Yemen in crisis. More than 22 million people urgently need humanitarian assistance – that's more than three-quarters of the population.

Please pray for Tearfund partners in Yemen as they distribute cholera kits, water filters and medicines to treat the disease, and as they promote hygiene and provide clean water. Yemen's health, water and sanitation systems are at the point of collapse.

Thank God for the generosity of Tearfund Ireland supporters and supporting churches who responded to the appeal for funds for Yemen at the end of last year.

Continue to pray for peace in Yemen, and for the peacemakers, so that those who are suffering can receive the help they need and rebuild their lives.

JUNE 2019

SELF-HELP GROUPS IN ETHIOPIA

'I appeal to you... that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.'

1 Corinthians 1:10

For the past ten years, our partner Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church has been working alongside church leaders, encouraging them to look at the material needs of the community as well as people's spiritual needs.

More than 1,500 local churches in Ethiopia are currently helping their communities address issues such as learning how to save money, caring for their environment, combating illiteracy and tackling food insecurity.

Give thanks for the growing Tearfund Ireland Ethiopia team. Pray for good relationships between colleagues, churches and partners.

Give thanks for self-help groups across Ethiopia – for the transformation of lives and the close friendships and support that have been formed. Pray for new self-help groups that have been established over the past year, that they will be well established and grow together in unity.

Pray that the church will glorify God through the work they are doing with self-help groups.

JULY 2019

CHILDREN BELONG IN FAMILIES

'God sets the lonely in families.'

Psalms 68:8

Spend some time reflecting on the verse above. Ask God to lead you in prayer for the 80 per cent of children living in institutions who have at least one living parent. Pray that more and more children will be reintegrated with family and community by our partners in Cambodia, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

Please pray for our partners as they work hard to trace families of children currently living in institutions in Cambodia and Nepal. Please pray that they will have wisdom, perseverance and success.

Pray for children, families and community involved in the process of reintegration. Pray for compassion, patience and grace.

James 1:27 says: 'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.' Why not set a reminder on your mobile phone for 1:27pm each day to prompt you to pray for orphans and widows across the world?

BEYOND HOPE

More than 1.5 million refugees are living in cramped, precarious conditions in Lebanon – struggling to come to terms with their trauma and dream any dreams for the future. But the gospel is bigger than this. You can help restore hope by enabling the church to reach out in practical ways. Please give today.



Photo: A young Syrian girl living in a tent in the Bekka Valley, Lebanon: Tearfund



€45 could give a refugee family an emergency kit containing soap, shampoo, toothpaste, sanitary towels and nappies.



€90 could protect the health of 20 children, by giving each of them a nutritional supplement packet.



€68 could provide 20 families with portable stoves, protecting them from hunger.



€128 could provide 25 vulnerable teenage girls and women with vital feminine hygiene kits to help protect their health.

Visit tearfund.ie/donate or call 01 878 3200.

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