

Pastor of Church in Damascus: 40 Percent of Congregation Has Fled the Country

Pastor Edward from Damascus paints a sad picture of the situation in the Syrian capital.

“The situation is very grim,” he says. “There is deep sadness and much stress and anxiety.”

According to the pastor, approximately 40 percent of the members of his church have left the country since the civil war in Syria started 2 1/2 years ago.

Imagine if 4 of every 10 members of your church left in such a short period—a major loss for every congregation. That is the reality churches in Syria now face, as the example from Damascus shows. People that have financial means and contacts abroad often leave the war-torn country.

Pastor Edward knows that in his church, some members still are waiting for the opportunity to leave Syria. “They are still trying to find a place to go,” he says.

However, all the people that left didn’t leave the church services empty.

“No, we see new people coming to church,” Edward says. “Many of the families that we visit and help with a monthly food supply come to our services now.”

Although there is no fighting going on in the central area of Damascus, in several suburbs fighting is a daily reality. No one can escape the distant sound of explosions and shooting.

“It seems that there is no end in sight,” Edward says. “Christians are like all other people—concerned for their

safety and the future of their children.”

In a way, life goes on for many people in Damascus. People who work in the public sector still go to work.

“But their income is worth less and less as the Syrian pound lost 75 percent of its value, which has caused huge inflation,” Edward says. “After 2 1/2 years, most people are suffering economically and are traumatized emotionally.”

The pastor also mentions a brighter side. He says, “Church people are closer to the Lord and to each other.”

Relief Work to Displaced Families Making Impact

“The relief work through our church is still going on,” Edward continues. “It is becoming more difficult because of the higher risk and the unavailability of materials. In some cases it takes us a couple of weeks to get some of the items for the food packages.

“But thank God we have committed people who are still doing the job, and the relief package is still one of the very few good things that many displaced families receive. The visiting teams are still doing their wonderful work in personally touching the pain of many families and offering some physical and emotional support.”

The pastor is thankful for the support for the relief work through his church in partnership with Open Doors.

“Thank you so much for your prayers and concern; we as the church in Syria appreciate your help and support,” he says.

Pastor Edward wants to stay in Syria.

“My wife and I have a deep sense of peace, and we both believe that this peace is a gift from God so we can stay in the country to encourage our people and to relieve some of the suffering,” he says. “We strongly see the hand of God in the

church and with the church, which makes us want to stay. We believe that God will help us overcome the challenges that come on our way. We have a strong sense of responsibility and see it as a privilege to stay at such times in the country. Although we go through low times and some struggles, we trust the sovereign hand of God and His goodness."