

Tent Churches Emerge in Iraqi Refugee Camps

Fatima, an Iraqi woman who had fled atrocities committed by the Islamic State (ISIS), was drawn to the sound of singing in a tent in a refugee camp in Dohuk, a city in the Kurdish region of Iraq. She approached cautiously.

Though embarrassed when the Christians worshipping inside saw her, she came closer and asked if she could enter and listen to what they were saying. By the time the meeting finished at 4 a.m., she was on her way to embracing Christ as her Savior and asked if she could bring friends and family to the next meeting.

Fatima, her husband and three daughters put their trust in Jesus for their salvation, and within a few weeks her involvement led to another 60 families making the same commitment, according to an area ministry leader supported by Christian Aid Mission.

“Tent churches are going on everywhere,” said the ministry leader. “Last week we had 68 families openly surrender their lives to the Lord. With all their large needs and difficult situations that they are going through, they thank God for the indwelling of Christ in their hearts. Twelve of those families were Muslim.”

In addition, 200 children who received Bibles and coloring materials prayed to accept Jesus into their hearts.

Broken Hearts

Near Amerli, which Islamic State fighters besieged for more than two months before Kurdish and Iraqi forces aided by U.S. warplanes drove them out on Sept. 1, the ministry leader’s team encountered people in need of water, food and medicine.

In a visit with a group of families able to escape before the ISIS siege, the team found opportunities to meet both spiritual and physical needs.

“The Lord gave us many souls who believed in Christ there,” the team leader said.

In the northern city of Erbil, the leader’s team met with displaced Yazidis, a predominantly Kurdish ethnic group that practices a mix of Zoroastrian, Islamic and Christian rituals, who suffered the slaughter of an estimated 500 of their members at the hands of ISIS. Some 130,000 Yazidis of Sinjar had fled to Erbil or farther north to Dohuk.

“Our ministry to them was filled with tears and broken hearts to hear scary stories about abducted children and women and the slaughter of men,” the team leader said. “They asked us if God even exists for this to be allowed to happen. It was very difficult, but the Lord has given us grace in their sight to represent Jesus and the love of the work, which was shown to be wonderfully accepted among the Yazidis. They asked us to come back and took all our Bibles ‘in secret.’”

The Iraqi ministry team has prepared 2,000 Bibles, including those for children, plus 2,500 New Testaments in Arabic, Aramaic and Kurdish, along with tracts and Bible-based coloring books.

“We have a lot more that is needed, such as gas, workers’ support, radios, clothing and miscellaneous ministry items,” the team leader said.

Christian Aid Mission is helping the ministry to provide two kinds of food to Iraq’s internally displaced people—one for those who have cooking facilities, and another for those who are homeless. A box containing eggs, salt, oil, rice, cheese, beef, tomato paste, powdered milk, macaroni and bread costs \$25. For 300 tents for small families, the cost comes to \$7,500.

The team provides 800 sandwiches a day to different areas and groups at a cost of \$2 per sandwich, which amounts to a weekly cost of \$11,200. The ministry has borrowed sleeping bags and mattresses from a local store with the hope of repaying the merchants at \$20 per mattress.

"Four hundred mattresses cost \$8,000, and we are almost out," the leader said.

The ministry team also provides medicines for blood pressure, diabetes, headaches and stomach ailments, along with personal hygiene items.

"Our goal was to provide \$10,000 worth. We are starting with only \$2,000 now," he said. "Thank you so much for your prayers and support."

For more information on indigenous Iraqi ministries, see #HelpLocalIraq on Twitter.