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HOLD YOUR HEAD UP HIGH

By Shirley W. Madany

These days we are all aware of the Middle East. Ever since October, things have not been the same for us. It was then that what had been a regional problem spilled over into our world. We lined up for gasoline and experienced some anxious moments when total war seemed near. We watched Dr. Kissinger's rapid movements in and out of Arab countries and we sensed a real relief in the better relations established between Egypt and Israel. If only Syria would not continue to be "difficult"! Suddenly it really matters to us what happens over there.

But other things are going on in that area which does not get into the newspapers. Things that are really good news. The Christian Reformed denomination is not simply a spectator.

We have just returned from the Middle East and would like to share with all of you the extent of our involvement in that area.

Through our Arabic radio broadcast "Saatu'l Islah" and CRWRC relief work in Jordan with the Palestinian refugees, we do have a very real presence. In fact, we found that there is a growing appreciation for the Reformed faith and an awareness of its distinctiveness. We were astonished to find all of the Back to God Hour Arabic literature on the bookshelf in a Moslem's home.

Soon after our arrival in Beirut, Lebanon, we attended a reception at the Lebanon Inter-Varsity Fellowship headquarters. That evening we were told that "Saatu'l Islah" had been criticized in a popular leftist magazine. The criticism arose over a program entitled "The Generation Gap," in which parental authority was emphasized as being God-given. Our broadcast from the island of Cyprus comes at a prime time and is introduced as a special feature ending the evening's international service. This popular station reaches Syria-Lebanon-Jordan and Egypt clearly, and we discovered listeners just in conversation--store clerks and taxi-drivers.

We flew to Jordan primarily to visit three of our listeners. While there we also experienced the fellowship of the CRC community. Among them were Dr. and Mrs. Bastian VanElderen, Dr. and Mrs. Bert DeVries, and Paul and Anne Kok.

We cannot speak too highly of the fine way in which the refugee relief work has been set up: It is called "self-help." We are attempting to get families on their feet and self-supporting by giving them two Damascus-type goats. The United Nations representative whom we saw briefly said that they were very impressed by the way in which the Christian Reformed church has tackled the work in Jordan.

We can echo Paul and Anne Kok when they say "Jordan is beautiful!" One could spend many days simply seeing that interesting country--the forgotten Holy Land.

North of Amman, at Jerash, we had a very keen listener whose address was simply--the Youth Center. The town of Jerash is in a wide valley exactly opposite a very intriguing archeological site. Drenching rain prevented us from seeing much of those extensive ruins, but we did appreciate the lively pinkish hue of the stone in the well-paved Roman road. We turned into a town and discovered the Youth Center right at the entrance. Inquiries as to the whereabouts of Haidar brought first the traditional Turkish coffee. Soon our young man arrived and guided us to his home where we had a happy visit. This was the first Moslem home we were to enter, and it was moving to see all of our Arabic publications on his bookshelf. We have had a letter from Haidar since returning. Evidently it was an exciting event for him too. He is hoping to go on to university and seems equally interested in learning all he can about Christianity.

Later that day we called on another Moslem in his home in Amman. The house was bitterly cold and dreary. There was no room for visitors. The roof was leaking dismally into pans on the bed. It was no better than a refugee camp we had toured earlier that day. But such a warmth of welcome! Aatif and his mother don't have many possessions, but through a cheap transistor radio they have been tuning in to our broadcast. Just as the CRWRC relief work was beginning. Aatif had written to ask us if we could help him in any way because he had injured his back and could not do heavy work. Paul Kok investigated and was able to give him employment supervising the laying of water pipes. It is not often that we can take such practical action.

As the sun was setting that day, we found ourselves standing on Mr. Nebo breathlessly taking in the panorama before us. Away to the left the Dead Sea glimmered in a few rays of sunlight. On a clear day one would also see the outlines of Jerusalem and Jericho. This was where Moses stood! We reflected deeply as the wind sighed softly in a clump of pine trees and we tried to take in a most unexpected view.

Back in Lebanon we traveled south of Beirut to Sidon to visit Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel in their humble village home a few miles up into the mountain. This saintly couple is retired Christian workers and appreciative listeners to all our radio broadcasts. Mr. Gabriel, 86, and blind for many years, is a frail and handsome man. Mrs. Gabriel, a German lady with a good command of English, is one of our most faithful monitors and correspondents. What a precious hour we spent with them! We found them alert and keen to discuss the progress of Christ's kingdom. Mr. Gabriel wanted us to apologize to Dr. Nederhood because he can no longer rise at 2:30 a.m. to pick up our broadcast intended for India. Ill health and frailty have restricted him to listening only to his transistor. We joined hands and prayed before we parted, and we thanked God for this tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.

Another day we ventured up and over Mount Lebanon into the Bekaa valley region between the two snowcapped mountain ranges. At a village only a few miles from the

Israeli and Syrian borders we surprised another listener. This time it was a parish priest who is very interested in both our program and our literature. He invited us to have dinner with him, and there followed a unique fellowship. This Christ-centered priest (as others like him who are using our books with their young people) declared that if only he had known we were in the area he would have called a meeting. He has had years of experience with schools and is at present the head of a school for 1,000 children. The conversation was serious. He asked "How do you handle the Old Testament?" and he suggested "Why don't you try a question and answer program some time?" He referred to some Christian programs as being very "superficial." As we parted he said simply, "Now we are family."

We would like to express our deep appreciation for the Christian Reformed couples who have gone abroad in the course of their careers and have by their very presence become involved in a very effective form of mission work. Besides our CRC community in Jordan we became aware of Dr. and Mrs. Roger DeKok who are opening their home in Beirut to young people seeking to know more about the Reformed faith. We hope that more young people will see this as a "calling."

And how can we express both ours and our listeners' appreciation for the absolutely amazing way in which you, the members of the Christian Reformed church, have responded to our eagerness to expand this radio ministry? We would simply urge you to hold your heads up high and remember that new converts want a deep and distinctive faith.