

## **Email Update and Prayer Requests from Elmarie and Scott Parker, serving in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria**

January 6, 2020 -- It has indeed been a very deeply troubling 48+ hours here in the region. Lots of tension over what lies ahead. The USG is sending more troops to the region—not only to Kuwait, but also to Lebanon (to protect the embassy here). The US Embassy here has also issued a ‘heads-up’ to all Americans here in Lebanon to stay ‘situationally aware’ of our surroundings—very much like what they periodically send to US Citizens in Lebanon.

Sunday’s actions by the Iraqi Parliament putting forward a recommendation to the Prime Minister that the US-led Coalition be asked to leave Iraq will also have a variety of ripple-effects, no doubt.

I’ve been in touch with all of our partners in Iraq. The situation in Baghdad, according to Rev. \_\_\_\_, is very, very tense. I’m sure you’ve seen on the news the very large numbers of people coming to the funeral services and now, instead of primarily protesting the presence and influence of Iran in Iraq, now protesting the USA presence in Iraq. Everyone is very concerned about what will come next, and who knows for how long we will be waiting for that ‘next.’ The escalating rhetoric between the USG and Iranian officials is very distressing.

In Basrah, there are also tensions. Dr. \_\_\_\_ shared that people are just trying to stay off the streets as much as possible, though those with jobs are still going to work—even in the oil fields.

The situation in Kirkuk is a bit different, but with US troops located nearby, the base is obviously one possible location for a response from Iran.

Our colleagues in Dohuk report that things there are quiet and quite normal.

Here in Lebanon, we’re not quite sure what lies ahead. Daily life is continuing as usual—though that “usual” has been heavily impacted by the challenges and protests facing Lebanon these past number of months. Those affiliated with Iran have made clear that they will not target Americans studying, working, or volunteering in Lebanon. Their focus is official USG targets. At one level that may seem reassuring, but, of course, there is no predicting what will happen if USG targets in Lebanon are actually hit. I have a hard time imagining that attacks will happen in Lebanon because it leaves Lebanon too exposed to retribution by the USG or our neighbor to the South, and these same Iran-connected entities have been very clear with Lebanese citizens that they will act in Lebanon’s best interest—time will tell.

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On Christmas Day, Scott and I hosted a number of local friends for dinner here in Lebanon. During our conversation, one friend commented that it had surprised her this year in reading the Christmas story to notice how much of it happens at night, under cover of darkness. That is what the past several months have felt like here—a time of waiting in the darkness of uncertainty for some sense of in-breaking light. In many respects, we are living in an extended season of Advent, waiting for the ways in which our Lord will be making visible his kingdom ways in the midst of all that is happening. And, of course, our partners continue in their work—incarnations of our Lord’s light, each offering of their service a spark of light in the chaos of darkness. And Scott and I are seeking to be alongside of them in support of work that has become increasingly more difficult to carry-out (especially with the economic situation in Lebanon, it is difficult for our partners to even access the funds that have been sent by global partners). As well, here in Lebanon and Iraq, the protests have been made up of grass-roots people voicing their

anguished cry for a deeper sense of just governance in their respective countries. This too is light in the darkness of greed, corruption, and injustice. Our continued prayer is that these sparks of light would be strengthened through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ—Immanuel, God with us, the Divine who chose to enter into our human darkness—and be enough to overcome what in the past week or so has felt like even deeper increasing darkness.

So, the need for continuing prayer is urgent:

- For the persevering energy and hope of citizen protestors in Iraq and Lebanon as they seek deep governmental reforms that would result in a more just society for all citizens, a doing away of corruption that steals economic resources from the citizens, and a better system of governance that would pursue the well-being of all citizens and residents in their respective countries.
- For a safe-guarding of these protest movements from outside global and regional influences.
- For humanitarian restraint by security forces so that protestors may have their voices heard without violent retribution.
- For a new constitutional process in Syria to result in a more just society for all citizens and a government more representative of all citizens wishing to contribute to a sovereign Syria.
- For the military restraint of the USA, Iran, Syria, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel in the delicate situation in Iraq and NE/NW Syria and for a sustainable political solution that will preserve human life and dignity and promote a deeper sense of just governance across the region.
- For Scott and for Elmarie to have ears to hear how best to be of service at this time when our partners in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are under more pressure than ever.
- For the mercy of Christ to intervene in all of these human affairs, that a just peace would reign.

I have continued working with my Arabic tutor this November and December. Grateful for that opportunity. And Scott and his colleagues have persevered in facilitating another segment of Strong Kids, Strong Emotions during these weeks of chaos here in Lebanon...the kids have come alive during these sessions!

As we head into a new year, I begin to prepare for a number of work trips starting in mid-January through April (visiting teams coming to Lebanon—God willing, a regional planning trip that will take place in Italy, a trip to the USA for meetings, and a hoped-for trip to Syria) and will continue with my accompaniment work with partner in the region here. During this time, Scott will continue with Strong Kids and other work with MECC. And, then in May, for a good part of the month, Scott and I will be taking a long-planned for 25th Anniversary celebration trip to Scotland. We're very much looking forward to that time.

We remain so very grateful for your partnership with us—especially during this time of extended Advent waiting.

In Christ's Peace,

Elmarie