



PCCR

PLAIN COMPASSION CRISIS RESPONSE



BEIRUT, LEBANON

JULY - AUGUST 2020



A cataclysmic blast in Beirut, Lebanon's capital, is poised to send an economy already deep in crisis hurtling toward a dangerous unknown.

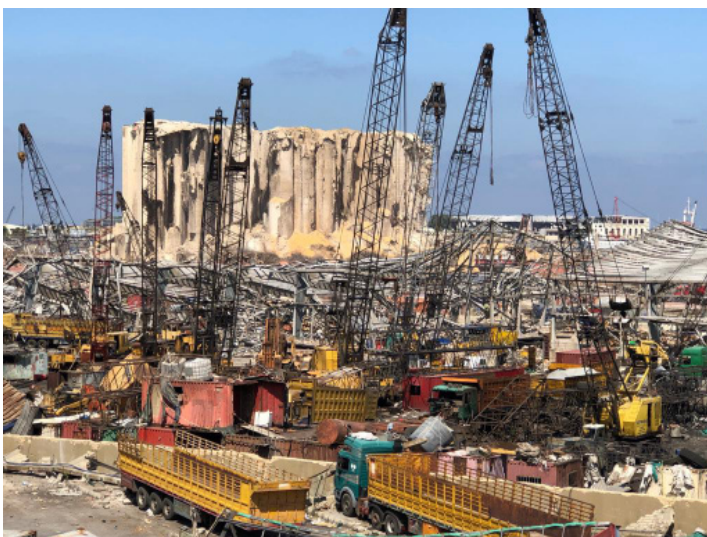
On August 4th, there was a massive explosion at the city's port when a warehouse holding 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate caught fire and exploded. This is believed to be the biggest non-nuclear explosion ever to detonate in an occupied area. The explosion left over 200 people dead, 5,000 injured and 300,000 homeless. The number of deaths is expected to climb as search-and-rescue efforts continue.

The blast, which also leveled huge swaths of Beirut and displaced 300,000 people, couldn't come at a worse moment.

In the past year, a breakdown in the country's banking system and skyrocketing inflation had triggered mass protests. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the World Bank projected that 45% of people in Lebanon would be below the poverty line in 2020. Tourism has long been a major part of Beirut's commerce and this year there are no foreign tourists because of COVID. If the current trend continues, 80-90% of people will be unemployed by the end of the year. Now there are many more humanitarian needs because of this crisis.

Today I was working with a local church that has a vision of reaching people for Jesus by providing food and other aid. Currently they are running a restaurant/soup kitchen called Agape Table, a clothing store called Mustard Seed where people can get clothing for a minimal fee and a food pantry where families can get 200,000 LBP (about \$29) of food per month for free. Since the blast they have been taking meals into the streets to the area closest to the blast. They have been doing food distributions almost every day as a way of helping those most affected.

(continued on next page)



A view of the once bustling port which now lies eerily silent.



People were extremely grateful for the food that we were able to hand out. The next day, the youth group from the church went out again to make followup visits, tell people about Jesus (the reason we were helping them) and to invite people to bible studies and church services. Because of the quarantine, all services currently being held on-line. For some of the conservative muslims and Armenians, this is actually a blessing. It is easier to attend a service on-line without being noticed than it is to actually attend a live service. God is using even the pandemic to His glory!



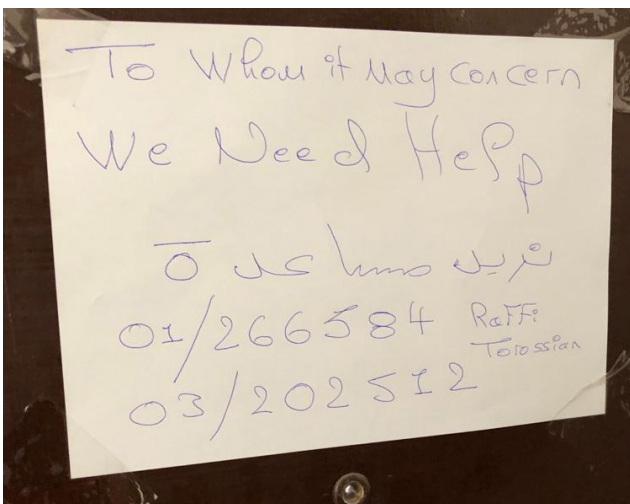


Today we took 100 hot meals and 200 sandwiches prepared by volunteers at the church and handed them out. These food distributions are a great way of reaching out to people and introducing them to the love of Christ. If people seem interested, they will come back for a home visit and then tell them more about Jesus and invite them to church. Many people are being brought to the Lord in this way.

I was able to meet with pastor Andrew of the Nazarene Church this morning and ask him what their biggest needs are. This is what he said:

“Trauma. Many people have been severely traumatized. My wife was not able to properly eat or sleep for many days. I have been through many wars. At least three here. But this was worse. This was like the end of the world. Our son was missing. We didn’t know where he was, whether he was dead or alive. I was in bed resting and heard a loud noise. I said ‘It’s an earthquake!’ and jumped out of bed. As I jumped all the glass fell down, there was glass everywhere. You couldn’t walk anywhere without stepping on it. I ran outside to find my son. He had been biking with his friends and when the blast happened, he didn’t know what it was. He just dropped his bike and ran home. Thank God he was okay. Four nurses died right here in the hospital. They were standing close to the windows and were killed by the force of the windows shattering from the blast.

One of the neighbor boys was on the roof of his house and the pressure from the explosion caused internal bleeding. They rushed him to the hospital but he died the next day. All around, I didn’t know what to do! I was running to find my son, people were screaming, crying, bleeding, calling to me for help.



A sign posted on a doorway. Similar signs are popping up all over the city, posted by people desperate for help.

So much disaster, so much heartache, so much fear. And yet, as they reach out with the little they have, God is faithful to bring an increase. So much good is happening because of this explosion! One of the students at the school is a Muslim. Last year his parents moved to a different area in the city and they wanted him to transfer to a school that was closer to their new home but he insisted that he doesn’t want to leave this school. He likes this school and wants to stay.

In the explosion, his house was pretty much completely destroyed and he was injured badly. Flying debris hit him and it took more than a hundred stitches to sew him up again. The church has been reaching out to his family and this is what his mother said; “We are so grateful to our son. If he had not insisted to stay in your school, we would not have any help. We reached out to our family but even they won’t help us. Only you help us!”

This boy had a bible in the house, laying on a coffee table. Amidst all the rubble, flying blocks and glass, and falling plaster the bible remained completely undamaged. The mother said; “We know now who the real God is!”

I also had the opportunity to meet with the school principal, Marlene Mshantaf. This is what she said:

“Rebuilding is going to be hard for these people. One window can cost as much as \$100 to replace. At the current exchange rate that equals 700,000 LBP and the current salaries are between 600,000 and 1,500,000 LBP per month. When you start cleaning up and rebuilding, you always find more stuff that needs fixed, things that you didn’t see at first. We have a playground with artificial turf. At first, we thought it was fine. But then we noticed that all the glass from the neighboring building had fallen and was scattered all across the playground. There are tiny shards of glass all through the turf! We can’t clean it out and to replace it will cost almost \$6,000!

We have a lot of students here that are from low-income and poor families. And many are from displaced families from Iraq, Syria, Nigeria and other places that find it very hard to pay tuition fees. Right now it is even hard for the Lebanese to pay. Nazarene Compassionate Ministries helps a little with tuition fees but many people have been out of work for 6 or 7 months. People are coming crying, and saying; “We want our children to come to school but we can’t eat! How can we send our children to school?”

It has been a VERY hard year. Usually the Lebanese are a very happy people. They love life. But it’s been a hard year. We started school in October, then we had the revolution, the following economic crisis, COVID, and now the blast.

I was a student during the civil war in 1975-1991. Our house was destroyed three times and once we spent 3 or 4 months in underground shelters but we were always able to rebuild. This. This is worse. Now there is no hope. We don’t know what to do.”



Louisiana Report

Hurricane Laura roared through southwestern Louisiana early Thursday morning, killing at least eighteen and leaving behind a wide path of destruction. As many as 17,000 evacuees are seeking shelter in Louisiana and Texas. 350,000 are without power in an outage that could last a month. (news sources)

Hot and humid. Roads littered with debris, many of them totally blocked. Houses with shingles missing, gaping holes in the roofs, entire sections blown away, or ripped completely off of their foundations and strewn across the field and into the woods. Trailer houses and campers flipped on their sides. Just about everywhere trees snapped off or pulled up by the roots. Power lines and poles down everywhere, many of them blocking streets and access to houses. No electricity for days in hot, steamy weather means frozen and refrigerated foods are now rotten and inedible. It rains every day and the vast majority of houses are leaking. Some people have been able to get a tarp or two temporarily tacked over the holes in the roof, but many have not, and water runs into the house every time it rains making a bad situation worse. Some of them don't have access to tarps, some are elderly and not capable of climbing onto a roof and stretching a tarp and many, many houses still have trees on them.

We just spent the last four days in Lake Charles, Louisiana and the surrounding areas. Although much progress has been made already in clearing roads and at least



giving people access to their houses, much work remains and the recovery period will be long and hard. People are running out of food and water. Large sections of the city do not have running water and the water that they have is not fit to drink because of the flooding contaminating the city's water supply. Last night we received a call for help from a neighboring small town that said they have not received any help at all yet, people have no electricity, no water, are fast running out of food, and can't even get a vehicle out of their driveway because of all the downed trees.

It was absolutely amazing to see what happened when I put a simple post on social media and messaged some of my friends about going down to help last week. At 9 am on Wednesday I posted the need for volunteers and 9 hours later we hit the road. Two vehicles from Lancaster, PA, one from Ohio, one from Michigan, and two from Oklahoma with 12 men, chainsaws, gas, water, food, and a skid loader were mustered and deployed by the end of the day. A heartfelt thank you to those who responded and to those who enabled us to respond! Many prayers were prayed for people and many tears were shed at the outpouring of love that they felt when we showed up to help. We (hot, sweaty, and covered in sawdust and mud) were even called angels after we cleared the one driveway! To God be the glory! Pray that the seeds that were planted would take root and bring forth fruit.

We headed for home on Sunday and while I could hardly wait to see my wife and children (since I was gone most of the last two weeks with a trip to Beirut Lebanon and now this trip to Louisiana) my heart was crying for those we'd left without help and was really tugging to go back. Who will help them? When I talked to my wife about it, we decided to go down ourselves and to have more crews come down as soon as possible. Currently, we are planning to be there again and looking for volunteers to come down and help by the time this newsletter goes out. If you would be able to help, please reach out to us at: info@plaincompassion.org or by phone at: 717-552-8360 and let us know when you would be available.

Thank you, thank you! For your prayers and financial support. Without your help, none of this would be possible!

With a grateful heart
- Mike Stoltzfus



This family has 6 children living in a small house. 2 trees fell and broke through the roof, they were able to remove the one tree but the other was too big. We were able to help them in removing this tree and tarping the roof for temporary protection from the rain.



The amount of damage is hard to imagine. Hundreds of thousands of people are out of power in the sweltering heat. It rained every day we were down there and many, many houses have big holes in the roof caused either by the hurricane force winds or by trees falling on them.

In many cases, people that had evacuated before the storm aren't even able to return because of trees and debris blocking the way.



Partnering with the locals, we have teams working to clear roads and driveways, clean yards of debris, and to get tarps on roofs in order to limit the amount of water damage.

One of the volunteers from Oklahoma brought a skid loader along. It proved to be a tremendous blessing as it quickly cleared trees that would have taken much longer to clear by hand!

You can help by giving financially!

Please send checks to:
Plain Compassion
PO Box 356
Honey Brook PA 19344

Please put 'First Response' in the memo line. Any funds raised above what is used in Louisiana will be set aside to prepare for the next catastrophe. Thank you and God bless you for your support!

You can also visit our website to give online.
www.plaincompassion.org



“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”
Isaiah 40:3

Greetings from Arauca, Colombia. As I sit down to write this report the birds are singing, the sun is shining and the clouds are preparing for more rain. Life here is perpetual summer! The days are not noticeably longer or shorter from season to season and the weather options are pretty much wet or dry. The vegetation is green in the rainy season and brown in the dry season. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west same as anywhere else.

Initially all of life here was new and exciting but now it is becoming a consistent, predictable, day in day out experience. A new day, a new week, a new month. New demands, new faces and new strength needed to face the ongoing challenge of showing love and compassion regardless of how we feel. We are feeling more and more the effects of the day to day grind and choosing joy is important!

Something else has been very consistent throughout our time here and that has been the love and support of you all back home. God has been so good to us in providing so well for our physical, financial and spiritual needs. Thank you so much for partnering with us! The work here would stop without your ongoing financial and prayer support!

We are continuing to distribute rice and beans to families in need. The medical cases that we have been able to help with are increasing in number. We continue to distribute hot food in the morning .

For the last couple of months now we have been having children's classes in the villages where we distribute.



At present we are having weekly classes in three different locations with an average attendance of 25 children. For many of these children it is their first introduction to the word of God and it has been very rewarding to see their eager participation. First of all there is a Bible story and singing followed by coloring pictures and Bible memorization. It's a lively bunch of children to tend for an hour and a half and it takes a lot of creativity to hold their attention. It is our prayer that the verses they are memorizing and the principles for successful living that they are learning will stick with them and that the Holy Spirit will be able to use them in their lives as they grow up.

We have received a few requests to come and hold worship services in the homes of families in the villages. Throughout the week our team members are visiting friends, attending birthday parties of children we have come to know, and responding to specific requests for aid which need research. Our busyness helps us to cope with the reality of the ongoing quarantine restrictions. Flights are not available out of our airport in Arauca and travel by bus to the nearest operating airport is considered dangerous due to the ELN (local guerrilla militia group) which is active in the rural parts of the state. We are hoping that Colombia's borders will open before the end of the year. Until then pray that our team remains strong and effective.

These dear people are so grateful for the food supplies we can provide for them. The needs are great! The fields are white for harvest! Our monthly supporters are a huge blessing and we are looking for more people to join our monthly support team. Would you prayerfully consider partnering with us?



Scan the code above with your smart phone or visit our website for more information on the needs in Colombia and the difference your monthly support can make in the lives of Venezuelan refugees. If you prefer, you can also mail us a check each month marked 'COLOMBIA MONTHLY SUPPORT'. Thank you for your continued support!

What I saw over the next few days changed my life and the lives of my family forever.

Every day we I would wake early and wait impatiently until breakfast was over in order to run up the hill to where the American team was staying. They had brought in two portable housing units and set up base there. That was another thing that was different about them, they seemed just as comfortable living like us as in the nice, comfortable life I knew they had left behind. After all, all of us would watch American TV shows longingly, dreaming of being able to live like the Americans did. Given the chance, any one of us would have moved to America as fast as we could pack our bags and would never have looked back. And yet here were these Americans leaving the luxury of life in America and coming over here to live in a little tin shack - to live with us, work with us, and maybe even more importantly, pray for us and simply sit with us.

It was these last two that had the biggest impact on my family. Most foreigners would come, hand out some food (often with the hidden intent of trying to convert us to their religion), take a bunch of pictures, and then leave never to be seen again. It wasn't hard to tell that they didn't really care about us. So it was understandable that we help these young people at arms length, so to say, for a bit. After all, they would surely leave again soon too.

However, as days turned into weeks, weeks into months, we became convinced that these guys were different. For on thing, when they prayed, their God actually answered! There were numerous cases of sickness in the village that were considered hopeless but when the Americans prayed for them they became well again! The other thing was the way they loved us. Yes, they actually loved us. They would sit with us for hours, often in homes where no one spoke English and they didn't know the Kurdish language so they would just sit for hours listening as my brother or I interpreted for them. Just listening as people shared their stories. Stories of heartbreak, of the devastating flight in the middle of the night, of children that no one knew where they were, whether they were dead or alive. In our culture relationships mean everything so the fact that they were willing to sit with us for hours in cramped, cold quarters meant a lot. It wasn't long until I realized that whoever this God was that they served, I wanted to serve Him too. One day they gave me an audio player with the Bible loaded on it in the Kurdish language. I spent hours just sitting somewhere listening to it. I would tell my family about what I was hearing and soon we would all be sitting in a close circle listening to the wonderful truths. All but my Father, that is. He simply wasn't interested. However, even he saw something different in these American youth. It's hard to describe exactly what it was, maybe a mixture of purpose, hope and joy but whatever it was was enough. Even my hardened father told them one day, "I want my children to follow your God. My religion has nothing for them but heartache and misery. You seem so happy, maybe they can be happy too if they follow your religion."

This is their story and my goal is to write it as factual as possible with the limited details I have. Names have been changed for safety reasons and I have taken liberty to add details as I have seen fit in order to create a readable story while maintaining the integrity of the account as told to me. -- Mike



This is a picture of my family with the Americans, sitting in front of our one heater. Even with the heater, we always wore our coats at night in order to stay warm enough.

This concludes part one of their story. About a year after this, the family tried to escape to Germany through Greece but was unsuccessful. In fact, they came very close to losing their lives in the process and ended up back in this village, out of money and out of hope.

However, nothing can take the hope that they have found in Jesus away from them. Please continue to pray for this precious family as things are still very hard for them in Iraq. Pray that someday God would soften even the heart of Deniz's father so that he too, could experience the joy the rest of the family has, even in the midst of trials.

Thank you, our supporter and partner for making this possible! Without your prayers and support, this family would still be living in hopelessness and despair as so many still are. Let us be ever diligent to do the work of the Father in order to bring glory to His name.

- Mike

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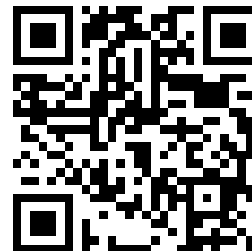
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- Pray for us
- Support us financially
- Volunteer to help
- Remember Plain Compassion Crisis Response in your will

Scan this code
to join our monthly
support team for
Colombia!



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

LOUISIANA

Currently, we are looking for teams to serve in Louisiana with cleanup and rebuilding following Hurricane Laura. Please contact us at info@plaincompassion.org or by phone at 717-552-8360 if you can help or would like more information.

COLOMBIA

Currently, all flights to the foreign fields have been closed because of the corona virus. At this point we are expecting travel to Colombia to resume after September 30th. Of course, there are no guarantees at this point but that is what we are being told. The needs in Colombia are even greater now than they were before the quarantine! Please pray about getting involved and helping us to meet these needs and making disciples of these nations.

- A mature, single girl to help in the kitchen preparing meals, cleaning, doing general housework and assisting with schooling Conrad's five children
- A mature, single man to serve as a team leader long term (3 months or more)
- Short-term (1 or 2 month) volunteers to serve in street ministry and assisting with general and household duties
- Another couple to join Conrad and Darlene as they serve and assist them with caring for the needs of team members and running day-to-day operations
- As always, Spanish speaking volunteers are greatly needed in Colombia

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