

**Brent and Margaret Strong**  
**Humanitarian Volunteers in Jordan November**  
**2012 - July 2014/Nov 2014 - May 2015**



Our mission started with a meeting, in Jerusalem, between Elder Jeffrey Holland and Patriarch Fuoad Twal, the head of the Catholic Church for the Middle East. Throughout the world the LDS Church and the Catholic Church have found common ground on many issues and the relationship between the churches is friendly. In the Middle East, however, some of the local priests viewed the Mormons as "sheep stealers" and they were quite antagonistic. This tension was proving to be an impediment to advancing the legal and humanitarian status of the LDS Church in Jordan. Therefore, to improve relationships, Elder Holland was anxious to cultivate a friendship with Patriarch Twal in hopes that the good feeling might permeate downward to the local clergy. Elder Holland asked what the LDS Church could do to help the Catholics in the Middle East. Without a moment's hesitation, Patriarch Twal suggested that Elder Holland might find someone to help the American University of Madaba (AUM), a university recently founded by the Catholic Church in Jordan.

A call was issued and Margaret and I were given the assignment of helping AUM and, simultaneously, improving relationships with the Catholic Church in Jordan plus work on other, more traditional, LDS Charities projects.

Most weeks we spent 3 days at AUM meeting repeatedly with the president, vice presidents, and deans to get their ideas about the direction of AUM, the methods that

should be used to advance AUM, and other details needed for the accreditation work. We have taken their ideas, plus some of our own, and written the strategic plan, the vision, mission and values of the university, and documents indicating why AUM is eligible to begin the formal (5-year) accreditation process. We have also trained the faculty and staff on their responsibilities to achieve accreditation.

There are 3 missionary couples in Jordan serving as humanitarian volunteers. We each have specific stewardships and also work closely together in big projects that require all hands on deck.

One of the major areas where we all work together is with refugees. We arrived in Jordan the 1<sup>st</sup> of November and were told about a shipment (winter clothing) coming from SLC due to arrive before December. In January, we finally got the desperately needed shipment (6 ocean containers) of 20,000 winter coats + hats, boots and gloves for Zaatari Camp (1<sup>st</sup> refugee camp for Syrians. The coats needed to be sorted by size so that they could be distributed. We worked very hard for 3 long days on cold cement floors. When the couple serving in North Jordan visited Zataari a few weeks later, they were thrilled to see several young men with Deer Valley coats. It was a very cold winter and we were glad to provide some warmth for these families living in tents.

Our Lady of Peace Center is a school (owned by the Catholic church) for children with disabilities. The center is available, for free, to anyone who needs help and many people from rural, poor areas bring their children there for school and therapy. At Our Lady of Peace LDS Charities sponsored (over several months) training sessions on cerebral palsy, autism, early intervention, and mother training for refugees who have been traumatized. As a result, the Catholic clergy in Jordan have become very close friends.

Eye care is the major initiative that we have worked on specifically in Jordan. In the past 3 years LDS Charities has given basic equipment to 6 Ministry of Health vision clinics and hospitals. Because of the refugee situation (about 1/3 of the population) the Ministry of Health is bankrupt. Not all refugees live in camps; many have integrated into the communities and seek healthcare from regular government clinics. With the new equipment provided by LDS Charities, clinics have increased their ability to treat patients from 10% to 90% and have increased their opening days from 3/week to 6/week. We also conducted campaigns to test people for diabetes and, when found, conduct additional tests for associated retinopathy. Over 8600 people were tested in these campaigns and, surprisingly, about 1/3 of those tested had diabetes and about 1/3 of those with diabetes had some retinopathy. We are grateful that we could assist these people in discovering a condition that, untreated, could lead to blindness.

We feel we have done what the Savior would have asked: We went about Jordan relieving suffering and just doing good. What a wonderful work we are all involved in. We are grateful to have had an extension of our mission. Jordan is now and has always

been a place of refuge and peace. It is an oasis in the midst of a boiling cauldron of countries. This is the work of God and he is the guide in what we do.