

*“For just as the body is one and has many members, so it is with Christ... The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12, 21, 26

## Our Brothers and Sisters in Christ

**T**his summer, three United Church of Christ Conference Ministers traveled to the Middle East with Peter Makari, Global Ministries Executive for the Office of the Middle East and Europe, where they learned about the situation of Iraqi refugees. This is an excerpt from **Jim Antal’s trip report:**



While the United States has allowed only a few thousand Iraqi refugees to settle in America, Syria is now caring for **more than 1.5 million** Iraqi refugees. One of the spokespersons raised a haunting question: “Why have the Christian Churches of the world not united with one voice to speak out on behalf of Christian Iraqi refugees, especially when priests have been killed and churches bombed?”

The Greek Orthodox Church in Syria is one of the many churches which have devoted all of their available resources to educating thousands of Iraqi refugee children. The Patriarch of the church reminded us that “We need each other as incarnate brothers and sisters – not as abstractions. Americans must know there are human beings in the Middle East whose lives are at stake.” Moments later, we ascended the steps of their church school. The classrooms were bursting with hundreds of Iraqi children. As we entered one of the classes, we heard a violin playing a familiar hymn, and then the children began singing, in perfect English, “Ode to Joy,” with new words that emphasized the need for peace.

As Christians, our responsibility is to pressure our government’s leaders to engage the world’s diverse faith traditions and political leaders to maximize mutual understanding, affirm interdependency, show a willingness to sacrifice on behalf of justice for others, and always defer violence until we have fully exhausted the possibilities brought by imagination. And we must teach our children the basics of dialog. Only in these ways will peace prevail.

*Conference Ministers James Antal (Massachusetts Conference), John Deckenback (Central Atlantic Conference) and Roddy Dunkerson (Nebraska), travelled to the Middle East with Peter Makari (Global Ministries’ Middle East and Europe Executive) in July, 2008. The full trip report is available online at <http://globalministries.org/news/mee/ucc-conference-ministers.html>.*

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