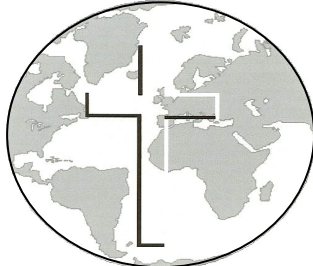


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LIKE TODAY—LIKE YESTERDAY

On February 26, 2015, I received an email from the Bishop of Al-Jazirah and Euphrates Diocese in Syria and the following is a synopsis of this email:

“It was February 23, 2015 around 4 a.m. that ISIS made a massive attack against 34 Christian villages along the Khabour river. Before this attack it was about 3 weeks that a group of ISIS attacked the village of Tal-Hermez and removed the cross from the top of St. Pethion church and sent a message to all Assyrian and Chaldean Christian villages to remove the crosses from their Churches and pay the shariaa tax. Most people in Khabour had already left for Lebanon and overseas since the war started in Syria, but still about 750 families living in their home villages and mostly are women, children and elderly people.

Some Christians from Hassake and the Curdish militia fought together against ISIS. It is believed that ISIS took into captivity 275 Christian people. The number of young Christians who died in the fighting battle, so far, 6 persons. The families that fled to Hassake are about 650 Assyrian and Chaldean families. A smaller number of about 100 families went to Kamichly on the Turkish border. The families came first to the Churches and then the Christian community arrange for them hosting families.

It is not yet known what is the destiny of the persons who were taken into captivity. It is believed that they will be used as human shields, and many of them were taken to ISIS camps in the mountain of Jabal Addulaziz”.

I cried after I received the email, that night I could not go to sleep, I got up about 3 a.m. and looked in my library for an old book, I always liked to read when my soul is sad and my spirit is down, reading from the book strengthened my faith and my resolve and reminds me that we have a great God, watching over his people and knows what is going on. The book, Arabic Christian Tradition, Volume I, Sawirus Ibn Al-Muqaffa, 10th Century, The Lamp of Understanding ,Introduction Critical Edition and Indices by Father Samir Khalil, Cairo 1978. I read a few pages, which comforted me and I was able to go to sleep. I sent a copy of these few pages to my brother in Christ, Professor Sadik Wardeh to translate it for me, as he is much more versed in translation than myself, and here is the translation of these pages.

It so happened that a wealthy young man called Ibn Raja was converted from Islam to Christianity during the days of Caliphate Al-Aziz Bellah (975-996). He died during the reign of Al-Hakem Be-Amer-Allah (996-1021) around 1002 after a long struggle because his family wanted him to return to his original religion.

After his conversion he went to Saint Sawirus Ibn Al-Muqaffa seeking his wisdom, to take advantage of his vast knowledge and to strengthen his faith. And so a strong relationship began to be built between both of them. Ibn Raja changed his name to “the obvious” and became close friend with the respectable, scholarly man Sawirus, Bishop If Al-Ushmunain know as Ibn Al-Muqaffa



WHAT HAVE WE DONE WITH YOUR MONEY?

This past November, United People in Christ celebrated its 16th Birthday, helping our needy brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East.

Since its inception in 1998, and as of December 31, 2014 your Donations have totaled **\$487,03.07**. of which we have distributed **\$450,828.00** to help our needy brothers and sisters in Christ living in Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. We continue to spend less than 10% of your donations on administrative operations. Your donations for the year ending December 31, 2014 totaled **\$53, 373.00**.

At this time, I want to thank the United People in Christ board members who continue to donate their time, money and talent to help me through the years. I want to give, however, special thanks to **YOU**, each and Everyone of you who donated money through the years helping us to help our needy brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East. I want to thank a very special couple, **Esther and Jonathan Phelps** who continue to donate \$1,000.00 per month to UPIC and have done so faithfully for many years. May the Lord Bless them both and their family and give them of his abundance.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS IN 2014 WERE AS FOLLOWS:

EGYPT:	Via National Baptist Church	\$1,000.00	
	Via Bishop Tadros for the poor & needy Christians in Port Saaid	1,000.00	
	Via Coptic Care	2,000.00	
	Via H..O.P.E.	2,000.00	
	Archangel Michael Coptic Care	1,000.00	
	St. Anthony Coptic Church	<u>2,000.00</u>	
	Total		\$9,000.00
IRAQ:	Via International Christian Outreach Fund	\$2,000.00	
	Via St. Peter & Paul Good Samaritan Relief Fund (Father Edward Hanna)	3,500.00	
	Via St. Thomas the Apostle Church (Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim)	<u>1,500.00</u>	
	Total		\$7,000.00
LEBANON:	St, Jude Catholic Church	\$2,000.00	
	Convent of our Lady of Kaftoon	1,000.00	
	House of the Elders	<u>2,000.00</u>	
	Total		\$5,000.00
PALESTINE: (WEST BANK)	Via Bethlehem Association	<u>\$2,000.00</u>	
	Total		\$2,000.00
SUDAN:	Via Light for Orphan	<u>\$1,000.00</u>	
	Total		\$1,000.00
SYRIA:	Via International Christian Outreach Fund	\$18,000.00	
	St. Peter & Paul Good Samaritan Fund	<u>2,000.00</u>	
	Total		\$20,000.00

TOTAL DISTRIBUTION IN 2014— \$44,000.00

**UNITED PEOPLE IN CHRIST
2015 SPRING PICNIC**

P I C N I C

TO BENEFIT NEEDY CHRISTIANS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

WHEN: SUNDAY APRIL 26, 2015 FROM 1:30 TO 6 p.m.

**WHERE: SANLANDO PARK
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FOR MORE INFORMATION AND/OR TICKETS CONTACT:

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Sawirus used to read the books of the ancient fathers and explain them to Ibn Raja. At the same time he used to interpret to him the Holy Books. Both of these saints remember very well the precious time spent together searching for the essence, content and depth of God's Holy Books to enlighten their minds. All this led them to interpret spiritual books. While Ibn Raja was being persecuted and tortured during the reign of Al-Hakem Be-Amer-Allah (it has been said that this Caliphate became so crazy and lost his mind during the last days of his reign). Sawirus saw that he should help him by energizing and strengthening his inner power. He did that by reading to him stories of the saints and martyrs, even about those who were converted.

Ibn Raja mentioned, in one of his books (that was lost), one of these stories that we shall recall it here about the martyr "Al-Hashemi" as it appeared in the history of the Patriarchs book.

"There was a man in Bagdad named Mukaddam Ibn Malek, known as Al-Hashemi who didn't care at all about anything concerning the needs of the kingdom. He didn't care even about the clothing, the beauty or anything else except that he used to ride daily with his soldiers. He watched how the Christians were practicing the sacrament (mass service). He rode his horse into the altar and commanded to have the sacrament handed to him, mixing it with soil after turning the cup upside down. Every time he did that he went to another Church and did the same until all Bagdad Churches stopped conducting masses or offering sacraments, as all the priests were terrified of him. One day, he went to one of those mass services as was his habit. God opened his eyes and saw something that scared him. He saw in the offering tray a very beautiful noble child. During the mass, the priest slaughtered the child, emptied his blood and placed it in the cup. Then he separated the flesh piece by piece and put everything on the tray. Al-Hashemi was really shocked and could not move. Then the priest went out offering the flesh of the child to the people and the Deacon was offering the cup that was full of blood. Al-Hashemi was observing both of these practices with astonishment. Then he said to his soldiers: Can't you see what this man is doing? Meaning the priest.

They said: Yes, we see. He said "how can he take a child, slaughter him, divide his flesh piece by piece and give it to the multitude, and then give them to drink from his blood? They said to him: "God be with you, our master! We see nothing but bread and wine. He got more scared and shocked. The multitude remained very surprised and wondering what had happened to him that perplexed him!

When the priest ended his mass and the people left he called the priest and said: Oh Lord, tell me in the name of God, what is this bread and wine? When he found out the secret and meaning of all this which appeared only to him, he said to him, I want to know the secret of this sacrament from beginning to end.

The priest then taught him the whole story when the Lord Jesus Christ took the bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them: "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you! Drink from this cup, this is my blood, shed for you. Drink all of you for the redemption of your sins". "The disciples also taught us a prayer to say in the altar about bread and wine and how the bread changes to flesh and wine into blood, a secret that God showed you today. No one in the whole world can eat raw flesh or drink blood like that. As a matter of fact, God has demonstrated to you the real hidden secret for your redemption".

Then he read to him the books of the Church and explained to him the secrets of the Christian beliefs until his heart was touched and opened to the word of God and so he believed in its honesty and authenticity.

He commanded his companions to leave so he could stay with the priest who baptized him by night and converted him to Christianity. When his companions came back to him with his horse, he dismissed them and never again talked to them. When they found out all this, they rushed directly to his father to inform him of what had happened. Everyone became very sad. His companions talked to him politely so he can change his mind, threatening him a lot to scare him, but all went in vain. He stayed firm in his beliefs and refused to change his mind.

So then, in the end, he was caught, tortured very severely, beheaded by the sword in the name of Jesus Christ and his martyrdom was completed. May his blessings fill us all and his intercession be with us. His holy body was honored by all Christians in Bagdad and founded a church known today as "Al-Hashemi Church". End of translation by Professor Sadik Wardeh.

It is indeed today like yesterday and what ISIS is doing today is no different than what their ancestors did and have been doing for the past 1400 years.

Today, the Christians in the world, especially in Syria, Iraq and Egypt are still being killed on a daily basis. They are beheaded and slaughtered like sheep. Their houses are robbed and destroyed, their Churches are burned, their crosses are broken, their women are kidnapped, raped and sold in the slave market, and the entire world, including what is called International Community, United Nations, E.U., etc. are not only silent and turning a blind eye to what is going on, but supporting and supplying the terrorists with weapons, training, money and intelligence to continue with their stealing, destruction and killing spree.

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Christians do not need anyone to defend them. They have one defender, his name is Jesus Christ, he sees it all, his eyes do not sleep and will revenge His own at the time he determines. He changed a terrorist called Saul to Paul to take His message to the Gentiles. He changed a thug called Al-Hashemi from a thug riding his horse to the altar, turning the sacrament cup upside down, throwing it on the ground and mixing it with dirt, to a believer who presented his neck to be slaughtered freely for His Name's Sake.

We have a powerful protector, cannot be conquered. Over 2000 years ago they conspired and plotted to kill Him., they hung Him on a cross, not knowing that they have no control over Him. He rose on the 3rd day, ascended to Heaven where he came from, sat on the right hand of the Father and will be coming back soon to judge the dead and the living.

Wishing every and each one of you a Happy Resurrection!

Amid Habib, M.D.

PRAY FOR FAITH TO ENDURE

By Dolores Devine

Recently, a beloved brother in UPIC relayed a request from a Coptic Bishop: "Please pray for our people, that they will remain strong and steadfast in their faith". This petition came in the midst of an onslaught of malicious persecution against Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere that we have witnessed on TV and the Internet.

Jesus told His disciples that, to follow Him, they must "pick up their cross daily". Paul taught that believers in Christ would share in His sufferings. Yet we never expected to actually see our Christian brothers, even children, being "crucified" outside of their church sanctuaries, merely for bearing His name. It was beyond our wildest imagination that barbarous beheadings would be broadcast worldwide for shock value and used as a recruiting tool for other deranged individuals.

To some, this might seem a "far off" danger. But it is up close and personal to UPIC members who still have families living from day to day in war torn countries. Many can give heartbreaking testimonies. Even I, who only have "spiritual children" here and abroad, can recount stories of horrific experiences. The apostle Peter warned: "Be not surprised at the fiery trials...you are sharing what Christ suffered". 1Pet4:12

I had the privilege of meeting this same dear Bishop last year and hearing him preach on "the cross". When I asked if conditions had improved with the new government, he replied, "Oh, yes. We only lost 6 churches this year". The previous year 64 churches were destroyed in his diocese. When I told him about the Prayer March and Prayer Service in Orlando last Spring, his eyes filled with tears as he said, "To think that people so far away should care enough to pray for us". As he closed his sermon that night, he reminded us to pray for the persecuted and to give thanks that we live in a country where we enjoy every comfort, especially religious freedom.

But do we REALLY have that freedom still, and for how long? Let us not delude ourselves. Our religious freedoms are being encroached upon day by day, bit by bit, as we remain silent. The distribution of bibles, displaying or wearing Christian symbols, prayer using the name of Jesus, and even the everyday practice of our moral biblical beliefs are being prohibited in the public arena, workplace, halls of justice, schools, graduation ceremonies, city council meetings, sporting events, hospitals, and even in Christian owned small businesses. Students have been sent home or suspended for wearing a tee-shirt, admonished for saying grace in the cafeteria, forbidden to bring a bible or have a prayer meeting. Judges we elected who swore to keep the law, are overturning it, instead. Christian professionals are being sued for refusing to render service in a manner offensive to God, and themselves, according to their understanding of God's word. Some are being forced to close down their businesses altogether. Even clergymen, military chaplains and pastors are being censored on how they can preach and pray. The mayor of Houston recently demanded to see, by Wednesday, the sermons that five local pastors were going to deliver that Sunday.

Does persecution still seem "far off"? Right here, right now in the USA, we have suffered beheadings, bombing, ax and machete attacks, shootings, and the slaying of 13 unarmed men and women on a military base by "one of their own", a fellow soldier loyal to "another law".

What can we do? Watch and pray. PRAY for the persecuted abroad and at home. PRAY for the perpetrators, that their eyes and hearts will be opened to the only Way, Truth and Life in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. PRAY that we will be aware, alert and proactive in sharing the gospel whenever and wherever we can. Stand up, speak out and defend our religious freedom in every sector by contacting your city, state and federal representatives. PRAY for the FAITH TO ENDURE whatever comes.

Jesus said, "according to your faith will it be done to you". Mt 9:29 Let us remember that no earthly circumstances can hinder the fulfillment of God's immutable Word and Promise. REJOICE and GIVE THANKS. Alleluia!

You may contact Dolores Devine at her email address: dd4tcc@gmail.com



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Amid Habib, M.D., F.A.A.P., F.A.C.E.
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UPIC Picnic and Annual Banquet

The Spring UPIC Picnic

will take place on Sunday, April 26, 2015 at 1:30 P.M.
at Sanlando Park in Altamonte Springs, Florida.
Please mark your calendar.

The Fall UPIC Banquet

will take place on Saturday, October 24, 2015 at 7:00 P.M.
At Eastmont Community Center
Please mark your calendar.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East, especially in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and the West Bank., are not only enduring persecution but also a very bad and harsh economical times. This Easter season, I am asking you to help us in helping them by sending your generous tax deductible donations in the enclosed self-addressed envelope and May the Lord Bless you Always!

ALL DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE