

# LIFE IN LEBANON IN 2007



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Life Member

**J**anuary 1<sup>st</sup>: I find myself in a war zone for the first time. I am at the wedding of the niece of my close friends who own a restaurant in Sexsmith, Alberta. I cooked breakfasts there over the past summer and a three-week trip was their Christmas gift to me.

Lebanon has often had a Christian head of government and many Christian cabinet members. Many have been murdered because of their faith, especially in the last five years. How did this start?

If we go back to Genesis 16, we find that Sarah made a bad decision. She gave her servant, Hagar, to Abraham so there could be a son, Ishmael. Later and much to her surprise, God also gave her a son, Isaac, in her old age. Sarah sent Hagar and Ishmael away into the desert. Ishmael is the ancestral father of the Palestinian Arab peoples including many Lebanese and Syrians, in the same way Isaac is the ancestral father of the Jewish peoples and many early Christians.

The offspring of these two brothers are constantly at war. Landless and homeless Palestinians have lived in Lebanon since the last war. Terrorism has been described as the “weapon of those without weapons” and the “weapon of the poor and homeless.” While some choose faith and brotherhood, radicals choose to kill by any means. Protests, bombing and other forms of killing immobilize the country. The infrastructure is severely damaged; we only had electricity for six hours each day. Looking at all the tanks, guns and soldiers struck fear in my heart, but being with local people who knew where to go and what to do was consoling.

Lebanon is easily the most beautiful country in the Middle East. It has 230 miles of Mediterranean coast and beautiful cities with over 4,000 years of history. It has mountains, rivers and cedar trees famous in scripture as well.

War brings out the worst in people or the best in faith. Catholics, for example, have statues of Mary at the entrance of their towns and proudly display religious symbols such as the crucifix outside and inside their homes. They express faith by their exceptional hospitality, love and kindness. Many have joined the remnant of Druze or Shi'ite and other Muslims in a common peaceful effort to bring brotherhood using the slogan: We love life.

In the 800 bed orphanage that I visited, all children are welcome. Some do have a mother or grandparent alive, but family members are too poor to support them. Members of the Druze religion look after them. They fund the school, mostly from Lebanese living and working abroad. Since teachers make only \$300.00 a month, it is a work of love.

What are the exceptional features of Lebanon besides the physical beauty of the country and the fascinating history? The first would be the people's determination. Their country has been destroyed at least seven times but they rebuild and begin again. The second would be their wonderful ability to share their exceptional food prepared with hours and hours of work. The third would be their hope, faith and love in a situation that could call for despair.

If you ever have a chance, but maybe at a more peaceful time, go to Lebanon and taste and see the goodness of the Lord. †

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## ST. ALPHONSUS PARISH COUNCIL, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Teddies for Tragedies has become a popular project in councils across Canada. Council members of St. Alphonsus have also taken up the cause but with a new twist – the 122 teddies lovingly knitted and stuffed were flown by Canadian Forces in December 2006 to the Canadian Forces Base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, for distribution to hospitalized children.

