

"Solidarity with Aleppo" – 8 months after the earthquake

I. Introduction

8 months have passed since the tragic earthquake in Syria and Turkey happened. You are probably interested in the current situation and our joint activities of Domus Orientalis and Caritas of the Archdiocese of Łódź in Aleppo.

As you remember, we managed to transfer the first funds almost immediately. Our partner on site is St. Francis Parish in Aleppo. At the beginning our coordinator was Roula but from summer we collaborate with Nadine, recently supported by Ibrahim. We also met an amazing construction team, collaborating with the Parish.



Initially, we planned to support all emergency activities, but there was a need to redirect funds to rebuild damaged apartments. For the time being, we are focusing on helping homes that have suffered less damage. Typically, we deal with deep cracks in the walls, ceiling, furniture and household appliances. The buildings were assessed as stable, but we must remember that any smaller cracks deepen due to subsequent tremors. During our visit in April, we visited several families and started works in 3 apartments. During our second visit in July we evaluated finished works and gave a green light for a 2 new places.



In addition we focused on support to the families and kids („First Step”), coordination of medical support with „Redemptoris Missio” and „Giva Job” project. It was also important for us to deepen ties with the Parish and jointly search for new areas of assistance in order to comprehensively support the local community.

Total costs: **23 405 USD** i **44 880 EUR**, including administrative fees and funds from „Redemptoris Missio”

II. Restorations of damaged flats.

1. Roula

About: Roula lives in her sister Afifa house, which used to be the family house. She retired from work as a school principal in Port Said. Her husband left the family. Roula has three daughters and a son. Marina, 23, holds a degree in education and works in the Al-Nabaa Center in the Franciscan Church. Natalie, 21 years old, a 2nd year civil engineering student and works with an NGO. Jessica will start majoring in architecture soon, her passion since she was a little girl. Jack is Jessica's twin brother who suffered and collapsed after the earthquake, his condition affected his studies and still is in high school. The family lives in very difficult conditions given the circumstances. They all work hard to put bread on the table, not aiming high, just to have a decent life.

The parish aid helps them survive the hard days but the earthquake caused major damages to the household and threatened this family to be left without a shelter and emotionally scattered. The restoration works brought back this sense of having a secure home.



Address: Venezuela Street

Works: Restoration of walls and ceiling, painting, roof isolation, installation of new electricity wires, water pipes, doors and windows, repairs of kitchen including counter and cabinets.

2. Laila

About: Laila, 80, is a poet who suffers from lingering health problems. She lives with her husband, Khaled Agha Al Qalaa, 83. He suffers from partial vision loss in both eyes due to diabetes as well as other health complications leaving him exhausted. Yet, their love bond makes it easier for them to survive the loneliness at home. They have one daughter, Riwa', 20 who immigrated to France and never been back since then. They both face difficulties to leave home even to get food.



The parish supplies them with daily meals and assumes their needs from time to time. The earthquake caused part of the ceiling and a wall to collapse while other parts of the ceiling were left severely damaged with water leaking over their heads.

The restoration of the house enabled them to be sheltered again and filled them with hope.

Address: Azizieh neighborhood

Works: restoration of walls and ceiling, isolation works, water drain and wallpaper



3. Pierre.

About: Pierre lives in a small house with his wife Rania, and two daughters, Myriam and Emma. He works for a pharmaceutical laboratory in medicines delivery to pharmacies. Rania is a housewife. Myriam's husband left for Lebanon but given the crisis there, she couldn't join him and moved back to her parents' along with both her kids. She works selling popcorn at the movies to make a living. Emma was unable to continue her education due to the situation and also works as a beautician in a nail salon.



The family is struggling financially due to the high inflation and large bills even though 3 already work and the latin parish assists them when possible.

Address: Sulaymanieh neighborhood

Works: concrete repair works, isolation, wood works, plumbing works and painting.

III. "First Step" - support for children as a financial relief for parents.

Another direction of our assistance activities is to support children and their families. You surely know about our "First Step" program, which currently covers 320 kids from Aleppo. Thanks to the generosity of Donors, it was possible to increase the amount of monthly support, which is of great importance, especially after the earthquake.

During our stay in April there was a distribution of funds and a touching meeting with the families. Children and their parents came up to us, took pictures, thanked the Polish people for being with them, for their support.



During the summer we organised a distribution of school backpacks and stationaries again.

This time, however, due to the situation after the earthquake, backpacks full of school supplies were given to all children under the care of the parish, i.e. about 1400. Thanks to this, we not only relieved household budgets, but also brought a lot of joy during this difficult time.

The distribution took place in July during our last visits. Those who were absent received their backpacks before the new school year started.



IV. Redemptoris Missio – medical project

After the earthquake, Redemptoris Missio, a Polish NGO, reached out to send financial support to Aleppo. Domus Orientalis communicated the offer to St Francis Parish who pointed out that at that very moment the support for their project for the distribution of chronic diseases medicines just ended and an agreement was reached. The donated amount covered 80% of the bills of the needy patients registered at the Parish for two and half months, enabling them to receive their medicines and paid only 20% of the original price from three local pharmacies whom the parish entrusted to dispense the presented prescriptions and send the bills covering the 80% reduction that the patients received. Domus Orientalis, as the coordinator for this project, undertook the mission to follow up with the parish and send reports to the donors.

Number of Beneficiaries: 500 during 3 months



V. Give a Job!

We also visited Mr. Rolle's flower shop, which we helped open a few years ago. The business is doing quite well, which makes us very happy.

We also managed to meet our beloved sister Antoinette, who still runs a wonderful project of a tailor's atelier, supported by us for years.

As usual, we had a nice time and bought some products, which will help to continue this amazing initiative.



VI. What next?

As you know from our shared experience in Lebanon, our main goal is to provide long-term assistance. Needs will probably change, but the situation of the Syrians was very bad, and the earthquake only made it worse. We also know from Lebanon, Africa or even Ukraine how quickly the "topic" is dominating media's mainstream, causing an influx of huge funds, and then fades even faster. For us, the most important thing is a steady support calculated for years, so that we can accompany when others move to another region, heavily publicized in the media, plagued by a new war or catastrophe.

In addition, one of the main problems currently faced by all entities dealing with providing assistance is the broadly understood treatment of trauma. Syrians who have not recovered from the most difficult phase of the war - which is still ongoing - are facing another trauma caused by the earthquake. Looking at cracked walls certainly does not help in regaining mental balance.



Our cooperation with Caritas Łódź, better and better coordination with the parish in Aleppo and your constant support are the key to the implementation of this plan. Thank you for being with us, trust and faith!