"Light for Beirut" - more than a project!

"4,3,2,1 - we light up!" - The Corniche in Beirut is sudenly lit up thanks to the "Let's Light Up Our Community" initiative. The crowd starts singing. A tear appears in the corner of the eye of Sumar - our Head of Mission in Lebanon, and her daughter Chloe looks mesmerized. What's so special about it? Well, Lebanon is drowning in darkness and without generators, the vast majority of households can count on 1-4h of "state" electricity per day. There are some areas without electricity for several days.

For some time it has become depressing to drive through dark Beirut, a city once called "Paris of the East", where the streets bathed in light and teeming in nightlife has turned dangerous, because of the dark neighberhoods of the city.

1. About the project

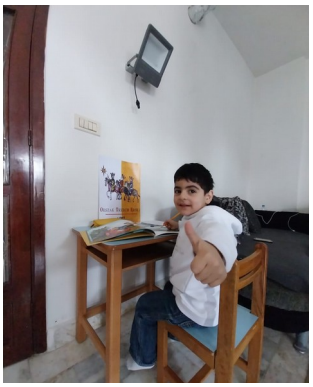
One of the goals of this year's „Procession of the Three Kings" („Orszak Trzech Króli) in the city of Łódź in Poland was to support 100 families in Lebanon. Together with Caritas of the Archdiocese of Lodz, we decided to spend the collected funds on the installation of lamps powered by mini solar panels. This way, we can help people light up their apartments and reduce household maintenance costs (paying the generator alone is a cost exceeding the monthly average earnings).

2. Implementation

We focused on large families as a priority, but with time the project was expanded to include lonely people and eldrlies.We also installed many lamps outside Beirut. For the next phase, we intend to include small workplaces or shops in the project as well.

From the very beginning, we were surprised by the kindness and happiness that we recived from the beneficiaries of the project. These beneficiaries often are that we have already supported in the past after the tragic port explosion in Beirut whether through restoration jobs or other forms of assistance (food packages, heaters).

3. We took some steps further!



Quite quickly it turned out that the collected funds will allow us to install not 100 but over 140 lamps!

However, something more important happened: after some time, one person asked us to meet up. It was one beneficiary whom we helped to restore the house and return to it after more than a year. This person gave us $100, saeved for months ($100 today is 1.5 times the average monthly salary), believing in the Polish Mission in Beirut. We cannot describe how happy we were about personal donations. For us, it is an expression that our actions make sense, that a community is created trough pain - a chain of support, that "good returns". For this $100, we will install two additional lamps.

In addition, it turned out that „Light for Bieurt" was joined by other, single donors from Poland, and, for example, the group "Żywy Różaniec" from Wrocław. This allowed us to install additional lamps.

We installed 5 lamps in Tripoli and 40 in the South of Lebanon.

4. South of Lebanon

In early spring, we were asked to support Christian communities from two villages in the South of Lebanon - Kfour and Homsiyeh. The situation there is extremely difficult, not only due to the economical crisis, but also sektarian tensions.

Christianity is gradually disappearing there, mainly due to the migration of young people. However, there are those who not only decided to stay, but also try to promote the region and work on helping the Christians to return to their native villages. After all, this is a part of Galilee!

What better could we do than to let the "Light" in the homes of the families living there? So far, we have managed to install 40 lamps in residences and two churches, while providing work for a local electrician. 10 more lamps are on the way.

And you know that in this case, "Light" has not only a practical application, it is also a mean of solidarity with people who believe that the world has forgotten them.

5. There is a story behind every installation:

- A. is Syrian, friendly and calm. He has been with us for a long time in Chadi's construction team. He lost 2 daughters and a son in the war, now he has newborn child. He is the one who installs lamps by the families.

- L. is a little girl whose dad died in the port on that tragic day. Her mother was pregnant at the time. After her father's death, L. became quiet, unpresent. Hiba from our Young Team - YBTE - helped her trough the therapy. L. began to smile again, and her little brother was born. One lamp for them.
- M. is the father of one of the first families we helped immidately after the explosion. We still remember when he came to the church to than us as if we renovated his whole house, although, in his case the help was minor. For once, we managed to bring a smile to the face of this kind and poor man.

- N. is an Armenian from Syria, living in a poor conditions in the Nabaa neighborhood. He gave his lamp to a Muslim neighbour ("Because he needs it more"). There was more situations like that during the implementation of the project.
- There are also situation where someone wanted to get a lamp without being in such need. Fortunately, these are marginal cases. Nevertheless, we alwyas check whether a given family does not have alternative power sources or even the number of hours of sunlight to determine the sense of the installation.

5. Summary and next steps

So far, we installed a total of **166 lamps**, including:

- 111 in Beirut and surrounding areas
- 50 in Kfour and Homsiyeh,
- 5 in Tripoli

We are currently installin additional 10 lamps in the South, and more lamps in cooperation with "Teta v Jeddo" for elderly people covered by their assistance.

10 more lamps will be installed thanks to individual contributions from private donors. There will be sent „thank-you” photos. This should encourage others to support and maintain the project after budget resources are consumed.