



**Matthew 22:34-40**

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."



Signs to guide the pilgrims



**Camino glimpses**

Following the way



Intimate worship places and wide vistas



St James

Madonna and Child, with angels



Liz Stone and I have returned from our times of leave.

We were both in the NCCA Sydney offices this week for Finance Committee, preparations for the upcoming Heads of Churches and Executive meetings.

As well, with Fr Shenouda, there were update meetings as regards the terrible suffering which continues in the Middle East, particularly as regards our Christian brothers and sisters.

Some of this is conveyed below.

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As previously conveyed, my leave included walking some of the Camino. You will see some images on the cover page of this newsletter. Some of you may have your own reflections to complement my few thoughts below.

## **The Camino of St James – Walking towards Santiago de Compostela from St Jean Pied-de-port.**

“I hope to be clearer about God’s plan for my life by the time I reach Santiago.”

So said young Dirk with his Minneapolis 500 t-shirt and American openness. We were resting our feet on the Spain side of the Pyrenees. He had his question clear. The answer, he prayed, was 750 Kms down the track.

Much has been written there are many ways to

First impressions were nigh international com-together. Along a track tained, in the footsteps back very many centu-

The major world reli-as a way to enhance open to divine illumina-some adversity for the

Our Camino of St James though any can walk it.



Cross at the summit of the Pyrenees, looking into Spain

about the Camino and follow it.

of this cheerful and be-munity making their way which is carefully main-of other faithful souls, ries.

gions all value ‘pilgrimage’ perspective, be more tion whilst accepting sake of a higher purpose.

is specifically Christian,

There are very many beautiful Chapels and Churches, mostly tended by a prayerful local soul, who will also give you a pilgrim’s stamp.

We were four couples together, old friends - “boomers”, - if you recall the cheeky girl in the Martin Sheen movie of *“The Way”*.

We gave company to others, including a brave Japanese social worker. Her husband had died. She had resigned her job and was walking into a new future. A Dutch woman, too, who had just finished a B.Theol, ‘crowd-funded’ her Camino through friends and was open to miracles. There were also many Koreans who loved that I could speak knowingly of their country.

With Australian dry humour, one of our blokes asked an Englishman, with a perfectly shaved head (like Gary Ablett Jr), if he would carry his pack. That chap kept well clear of us thereafter, just in case!

The autumn weather was benign. Still, averaging 25 Km per day was an unusual change of pace. But we had enough gear for a re-run of Scott’s Antarctic Expedition!

On the last night, over dinner, we asked each other what had been the best and the worst and what would stay with us.

There was nothing worse really than a couple of blisters. The best was about simple things: feet in a

cold-water creek after walking down a rocky path; the grace of each other and the deepening of friendships; undistracted time and space just to let matters arise and be pondered; the pleasure, as couples, of this kind of time together; worship with pilgrims and locals in beautiful Spanish churches.

Our gratitude for the divine gift of life is what will stay with us.

We walked whilst terrible news kept coming about what ISIS was doing. Our contrast with that fear and hate was this benign international community, full of goodwill and trust, walking with the Saints and the angels.

Our concerns were not about ideological battles and power struggles but about the ordinary things of people's lives – food, shelter, friendship along the way.

Three of us blokes had been close friends of the late Jack Keating. On the last night we found we'd all been thinking of him during our walking. The company of heaven is much closer than we often imagine.

We didn't reach Santiago this time (I had to return for Synod). Should it be in the divine providence, perhaps we'll see St James next year, towards the day when we all will "know as we are known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

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## News from our State ecumenical friends ..

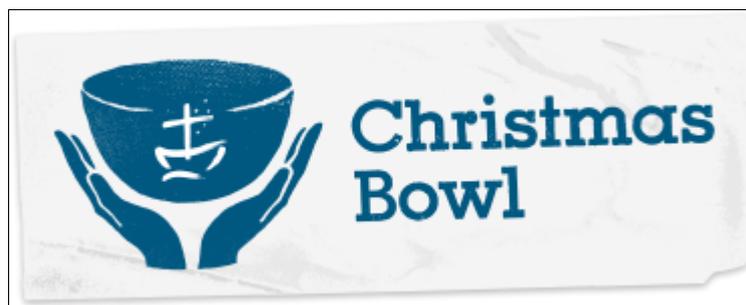
Attached you will find an important message from Queensland Churches Together as regards Christian-Muslim relations.

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Also, attached is information about research being conducted by Rachel Stevens *BAppSc(HealthProm) DipTh* on clergy families. This has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association. Please respond as you feel may be relevant in your situation.

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**Act for Peace Christmas Bowl.** [Act for Peace](#) staff have been busy finalising the letters to Churches and to 2014 kits. With all that is happening in the world we do pray that we have a very successful Christmas Bowl Appeal this year. For 65 years it has been a way by which our Churches have given tangible hope to people in dire need of our assistance. May the Holy Spirit go before us preparing our congregations to now receive the Christmas Bowl materials and respond as best is possible.



# Christians in Iraq and Syria

## A call to prayer, continuing:

October 24, 2014



Through our work with the National Council of Churches in Australia we have been part of a number of meetings and conversations about the dire situation of our Christian sisters and brothers in Iraq and Syria. It is clear that ISIS are murderous in their intentions and their actions.

This week we followed up an earlier meeting with Sydney-based members from the Assyrian and Armenian Churches. Some of what they shared is encompassed below:

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“Dear Bishop

I pray that you are well and wish to thank you immensely for contacting me regarding this very important issue involving our Assyrian Christian community. I do confess also that I undertook to provide you with some written submission which may have been used by you in meetings with the Foreign Minister. I have started the submissions and because there is so much to cover and so many daily changes it has become impossible for me to finish them.

On a general level, the situation with my people in Iraq remains ever so dire. There are thousands of refugees who have been internally displaced in the Northern part of Iraq with no food and water and certainly no shelter other than some tents in the middle of puddles and areas that potentially expose them to illness and disease. Many more have died and there are reports of hundreds of children being left as orphans.

Those that are outside the Mosul and Northern regions are also facing the potential of deportation or forced Islamisation or death or both. Our women and children are continuing to suffer at the hands of the Islamic State forces with continuous reports, some very graphic, of children and women being brutally raped.

Our Churches are still being destroyed and those that remain are empty of the faithful with many of them now transformed into mosques or Islamic centres.

In the earlier stages there was some support by the Kurdish fighters but that support has now really ceased as they are fighting their own battles against the IS, including battles along the Turkish borders. Indeed there are many reports on the media (particularly social media and the AINA) that Assyrians are being killed or otherwise persecuted and threatened by the Kurds; this is not just those Assyrians who have taken refuge to that region but those who reside in the "Kurdistan" regions of Northern Iraq.

The treatment of Assyrians remains the same: killings, rapes, beheadings, forced Islamisation, starvation, kidnappings (particularly of women and children), and persecutions of the most brutal nature.

The Iraqi government is unable to assist as are the governments of the world. It is hoped that the Australian and allied governments will be able to assist on the ground in fighting the IS and enabling our people to return to their homes.

In the meantime many thousands have fled and are endeavouring to leave Iraq to other parts of the world. This is a true tragedy for our people, who are the original people of that land and whose numbers are reduced to a significant low level with each wave of such persecution due to their religious and ethnic origin.

We again plead with you, the NCC and the WCC to represent the Christian Assyrians in this very difficult time and to lobby and endorse the establishment of a safe haven for the Assyrians in their ancestral homeland, the invasion of which has seen the numbers reduced to a "minority" and if not supported to their complete elimination from the region with the reality of a complete extinction in the near future.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the meeting tomorrow due to pressing work commitments. However, I would be grateful to be kept informed of any major developments and provide you with specific information if so required. I would also do all I can to attend any future meetings if I am provided with the time and date as soon as possible.

In the interim I pray that the meeting tomorrow is successful and praise God for making you and your esteemed members the channel by which people may find some salvation.

God Bless you."



Leaders of the Armenian Church brief incoming refugees and pray for their well-being.

**Members of a number of our Christian communities held a meeting with the Prime Minister on October 17, and issued the following media statement afterwards:**



On 17 October 2014, the members of the Conference of Bishops and Representatives of the Middle Eastern Apostolic Churches in Australia and New Zealand met with the PM, the Honourable Tony Abbott, in his office in Sydney.

The conference represents: The Maronite, the Melkite, the Antiochian Orthodox, the Syrian Catholic, the Syrian Orthodox, the Coptic Catholic, the Coptic Orthodox, the Chaldean Catholic, the Ancient Church of the East, the Armenian Catholic, and the Armenian Apostolic Churches.

The meeting took place following a request by the Conference members. The members shared with Mr. Abbott their concerns about the unfolding events in the Middle East, and their effects upon their Christian communities, especially the youth amongst them, here in Australia, and the people of the

world. They also demanded the Federal Government enters in a direct contact with them, at a time when the parents and relatives of their faithful are facing an existential threat in their lands of ancestry where they have existed for more than two thousand years.

On behalf of their people, and most especially on behalf of those who have been violently displaced, the Conference members expressed their gratitude for Australia's sustained and generous humanitarian intervention. The members were also deeply appreciative of the initiatives Mr. Abbott and the Federal Government have taken to make Australia's response to this crisis an effective component of the international response to the present emergency. They also offered their support for the Counter-Terrorism legislation the PM has introduced to strengthen internal security, for without social stability and confidence in public order and harmony, the communitarian fabric will crumble.

The Conference members put Mr. Abbott in the picture of their meetings with Muslim religious leaders seeking to open doors to direct dialogue, and establish the necessary conditions for social harmony. And, they urged the PM to go on offering the Australian model of harmonious multiculturalism existence as a viable solution to the people of the Middle East in order to usher in peace and stability to a region that is on the brink of catastrophe.



Pictured:

Some of the new refugees welcomed and supported by the Armenian Church.

Fr Shenouda, the General Secretary of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council, and I with Fr Avetis Hambardzumyan and Mr Sarkis Mouradian, representatives of the Armenian Church, after our meeting this week.



#### **What should we be seeking?**

1. Prayer support;
2. Increased Australian aid to those in this desperate plight;
3. Increase the number of visas for Christians to come here as refugees, resettled with the support of their communities and the NCCA family;
4. Increased support from the United Nations for the above, and for safe-zones protected by UN Peacekeepers.

More background is available in the attached documents. Among the various media reports, there is this very recent plea conveyed by [Catholic News](#).