

Lausanne Orthodox Initiative Collaboration in Mission EGYPT June 2013

Orthodox and evangelicals each have a rich and unique missions history but no modern history of collaborating in missions together. The Lausanne Orthodox Initiative leadership, in keeping with its goal to work towards better understanding, cooperation, and mutually strengthening each other in the work of mission, piloted a joint project in Egypt during the summer of 2013. This pioneering effort would be a picture of what is possible; a simple beginning to be built upon, a case study to critique, and a catalyst to inspire hope and further collaboration.

The missions project brought together volunteers from the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom and Egypt and evangelicals from the United States ministering to over 175 children from poor villages in Upper Egypt for four days at the beautiful and peaceful Coptic Anafora Retreat Centre outside of Cairo. Our goals included: being mutual learners of the other's mission methodology, priorities, and practices while at the same time engaging together in Gospel proclamation and service to the glory of God. The project was coordinated by His Grace Bishop Angaelos from the Coptic Orthodox Church and Leslie Doll, an evangelical from the United States.

The entire project revolved around the theme of "empowerment" and all activities undertaken by volunteers and children alike addressed this theme. In the spirit of being 'Empowered Beyond Belief', the volunteers engaged in daily Bible reflections together, studying Scripture, and contemplating how we, as Christians, are empowered to: repent, endure suffering, love sacrificially, rejoice, and serve. There was a fine balance between the time volunteers ministered to the children and the time they spent in fellowship, prayer, and sharing with one another. This allowed opportunity for the volunteers to connect on a personal and spiritual level, building relationship with one another, before collectively ministering to the children. Anafora, being a place of peace and spiritual retreat, provided an excellent environment for this.

The team spent the first day touring three desert monasteries in the Wadi Natrun learning more of the history and monastic life of the Coptic Orthodox Church. This time allowed for fellowship, team building, project briefing, and prayer.

Over the next three days the children were brought in from poor villages to the Anafora Retreat Centre to participate in the program during the day and were taken home in the evening. During the program at Anafora we provided breakfast, engaged the children in Bible teaching, worship in song, Scripture memory, prayer, health and hygiene instruction, and lots of playful activities and games. For each child, we prepared a personal gift bag filled with various items such as Bibles, t-shirts, tooth brushes, soap, school supplies and small toys for them to take home, along with a packed dinner for the remainder of their trip back.

At the end of each day the team debriefed, prepared for the following day, enjoyed a time of prayer and worship together, and built upon their relationship.

This time spent together allowed for meaningful conversations around their differing spiritual traditions and practices but also connected them in friendship.

By all accounts this pioneering collaborative missions effort was successful, worthwhile, and edifying. It joined a group of Orthodox and a group of evangelicals working together to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, make disciples, and serve children and one another in His name. This joint team created a new community in the Lord, learned from and encouraged one another, grew in understanding and appreciation for our different practices and expressions of faith in Christ, and created an experience to build upon in the future.

We are hopeful that similar projects can be launched around the world as models to learn from and inspire continued collaboration in the spirit of unity at the heart of our Lord Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, *“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*



