



*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined.” —Isaiah 9:2*

Dear friends in Christ,

Last week, much of the world was surprised to hear that the people of Syria were awaking to a new day. After more than 50 years of authoritarian rule, the regime of Bashar al-Assad was swiftly and decisively ended by Syrian opposition forces that, even now, are beginning to form the government that will lead Syria going forward. Having experienced almost 14 years of civil war and political instability, along with a devastating earthquake, many Syrians are rejoicing at this news as a sign of hope and new possibility. Given Syria’s historic place in the annals of history, its ethnic and religious diversity, and its geographic position in the heart of the Middle East, the international community is rightly concerned about how to support Syria’s political transition.

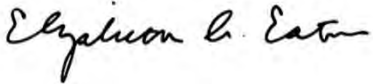
The al-Assad regime was characterized in part by devastating violence against civilians. More than 14 million Syrians were displaced, and many of them became refugees during those years, fleeing to find sanctuary elsewhere in Syria or around the world, including here in the United States. Some minority groups enjoyed protection or at least a “status quo” stability, provided they did not challenge the regime’s authoritarian rule. Today, four generations of Syrians who have lived under the al-Assad regime are anxious about what will come next. Israel’s and Turkey’s occupation of some Syrian lands has stoked fear of regional responses to the regime change.

In the ELCA, we recognize that some of our members are of Syrian nationality or heritage. Through ecumenical bodies such as the Middle East Council of Churches, we have long been in relationship with the Syrian Christian communities, which date back to the earliest days of the church and whose members live and worship today as a religious minority that is not always welcomed or accepted. These Christians hope that a new Syria will include a place of safety, security and freedom of worship for them and their neighbors. Syria’s diversity is integral to the fabric of Syrian society and should be protected.

In this Advent season of expectation, please join me in praying for all the people of Syria. We pray that those who have walked in suffering, oppression and occupation will be liberated by our liberating God. We pray for political prisoners to be set free, for families to be reunited, for those wronged to secure justice, and for all Syrians to live, work and worship in peace. We pray also for those who mourn the dead and missing, and who fear the uncertain future.

If your prayer moves you to action, I encourage you to give to the Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) Middle East appeal, which will continue to send aid to our partners, the Middle East Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, and the Lutheran World Federation, as they support those in need in Syria in the coming days.

In Advent hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E'.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America