

Experience of the Young People of Aleppo - Syria

In this time, when so many young people like us were thinking about leaving Aleppo for a while and going out to visit some relatives or friends in more peaceful areas, we were surprised to learn that all the roads around the city have been closed. This means that we can no longer leave, while the bombing around us continues. So we got the idea of going to visit the elderly in an institution run by the Sisters of Mother Teresa, where we haven't gone for a long time. We knew that 35 elderly people were living there, so we decided to spend a day with them. But speaking with one of the Sisters, we found that, in the meantime, their number had grown to 50. For us, this news, there and then, represented a big obstacle; it made us reflect on the amount of the donation that we wanted to give for the elderly. In fact, goods are scarce because the roads are closed, and everything is expensive. Our own economic situation, on the other hand, is difficult too because of the consequences of the war—many of us are unemployed, and those with a job have to support their families. In the meantime, however, a young woman called to tell us that she wanted to give a part of her salary to help the elderly. Then, slowly, following her example, other young people made the same gesture, and so Providence proved to be plentiful.

A mother asked her child—who is in Gen 4 (the Focolari's group of children between 4 and 8 years old [editor's note])—if he wanted to give some of his pennies. To his question: What will the money be used for?, his mother replied, "to buy food for the elderly in the home." The boy then immediately broke his piggy bank and joyfully contributed.

The next day, we went with two children to the home for the elderly. Everyone—they say in a letter—was very surprised by our visit; in fact, because of the bombing, it has been a long time since anyone has gone to see them. This part of the city is very dangerous.

After greeting them, they opened their hearts to us, telling us their stories. We learned that, because of the war, many of their children have emigrated and the houses of many have been destroyed. We listened very attentively.

Then, we helped some elderly people, who are unable to leave, to go down into the garden because, without electricity, the rooms were hot.

We sang and danced with them; we did everything we could to let them know that they are loved although they feel that they have been abandoned by everyone: their children, their relatives, and, in the view of some, even by God. The experience lived with us, we think, has helped these people find hope in life and trust in the love of Jesus.

The sisters thanked us and asked us to come back soon to back a project to support 300 poor people. With joy we said our "yes."

Despite all the pain and the absurdity of war, since our meeting at the shelter, we felt in ourselves and in these seniors the birth of new hope for a world governed by peace.

The Young People of Aleppo - Syria