



# Pastor Rami M. Al Maqdasi

Raya, wife  
Marilyn, daughter (9)  
Lisa, daughter (4)

Born in Basra, Iraq, I am one of three sons in a Christian family from ancient times, in the first centuries. My father, who loved to read the bible to our family, worked in a government factory as an engineering assistant. My mother stayed home and sewed clothes. Life was good.

When I was young and Saddam was in power, there was no sectarian fighting. Everyone knew we were Christians. When I was around 10, everything changed. The sounds of missiles filled the air in the Iraq-Iran War and began a series of moves for my family. We left Basra city and moved to Babylon city to seek shelter with family. We moved 7-8 times from rental property to rental property while in Babylon. Then, in 1990, Saddam invaded Kuwait. This started the Gulf War, a coalition against Iraq. This was such a horrible time in Babylon city and many places across the



country. There was no flour to make bread, no rice, and three months without electricity. We were unable to get many things because of the Blockade. In 1996

we returned back to Basra to continue on with life where my father's Presbyterian church existed and my father was so happy to find the new building in place and a new pastor. My

father took us to church every Sunday and at that time. I started to read many books from the church library and, also, the pastor's library! God was reaching me through these new books and new sermons which I had never heard and read before. One day I came to the Lord and asked Him to forgive me for all the bad things that I did and asked to change my life. After that event and daily thereafter, I felt a growing peace



in my heart. My life was turned around! I felt a powerful urge to tell people about this great change in my life in high school and

college.

The Presbyterian Church has been present in Iraq since 1850s. It was when I was 23 years old that I sensed my first calling from God to become a pastor. I started to serve as a youth leader, Sunday school teacher, singer, in charge of the church library, and preacher. In 2005, before my graduation from my college's English department, I visited the Harvard University in Boston and Roger Williams University in Rhode Island with a group of Iraqi students to start a new relationship between the American universities and Iraqi universities. It was such a wonderful experience. After I went back home

and graduated, I went to study at the Presbyterian seminary in Cairo, Egypt. In answer to that call, I left my family, relatives, church, friends and culture. I painfully watched from afar the tragedies that befell my native Iraq.

After the seminary, I moved to Damascus in Syria where my wife was living with her family as refugees. We were engaged at that time, and later we were married in Damascus. There were many Iraqi Christian refugees. I got a great opportunity to serve the hundreds of those refugees there. For this ministry, I worked with the Presbyterian Church of Damascus and a Missionary Alliance church. I served these refugees by providing them with food, medications and money for living expenses, such as rent. I served as a pastor in a Syrian Presbyterian church in a village southern Damascus and it was such a great privilege to work with the Synod of Syria and Lebanon. But I learned that the situation in Iraq became worse. I learned that many of my friends in Basra had been killed and churches were destroyed by car bombs of radical groups. These groups forced many Christians to leave their homes. I realized that it was dangerous to go back to my home country. I decided to stay in Syria with my family and worked as a pastor with the Synod of Syria and Lebanon. We loved Syria and life was good before the “Arab Spring” in 2011.

After the “Arab spring,” life in Syria became more and more dangerous because of the civil war between the government and the rebels. Also, my family received very serious threats. I realized that we had to leave the village and we knew it was time to go back to live in Damascus to protect ourselves and our very young daughter, Marilyn (born in 2010 in Damascus). I was very disappointed with a

feeling of hopelessness because now I had lost my ministry, a position which I cherished. Our hearts were broken, but we did that which we had to do. In Damascus, we faced a hard situation when the revolution became dangerous. One day Raya narrowly missed being killed by a missile attack. We were dreaming of a life in the United States where my family would be safe. We had already registered with the United Nations and waited for years for a chance to come to America for good.

After the rebels arrived near Damascus, the capital, the situation became more complicated in Syria. We moved back to northern Iraq (Kurdish Area) where my mother and brother are living. I was saddened by the loss of my ministry and started to think about what I should do now. How would I find or establish a new church? Who would support me? Or should we leave the turbulent Middle East? I had hoped that my church people in Basra would help me, even though I had been away for a long time. Some ministers from Iraq whom I knew very well criticized me for leaving Iraq. Also, these same pastors were opposed to the ongoing process of my family’s emigration to America. They thought that I should serve God and the church in my own country. Their opposition denied me a pastorate in Iraq. I was very disappointed, very sad. I needed to find some work to survive and support my family. My working outside the ministry would be shameful in the eyes of these Middle Eastern ministers.

Despite all of these difficulties, I still had my passion and joy to serve God, to respond to His call to him to minister in His kingdom. I praise God for what happened next. He opened the door for me to minister to thousands of Syrian refugees at a camp in northern Iraq through the Samaritan Purse and Alliance Church!



Also, I was helped by my friend who was a pastor from the Lutheran Church in Switzerland. This was a great opportunity to serve God and His people. What a great challenge this was to show these many refugees the love of Christ by our acts of love, mercy and prayer. God provided me with this ministry to serve His people and to take care of his family. The Lord was with us and He prepared a table before us.

Eventually, we arrived in America! I was very grateful that God had protected us during those very difficult times in the Middle East. Within a week of our arrival, we became involved at North Church in Williamsville. They helped us with their generosity and very nice friendship since our arrival in Buffalo. God is indeed good!

In August 2015, God blessed us with a new baby girl name Lisa. She was born in Buffalo. Now, Lisa goes to Pre-K and She will turn four years this coming August 2019. Wow! When my wife and I are thinking over the past five years since we arrived US, but it seems like yesterday! As parents we are grateful that our two daughters are filling our lives with joy & love. God is indeed good!

Once in Buffalo, I resumed a ministry to some refugees from Syria and Iraq. I had a good opportunity to help some refugee families

through the Jericho Road organization where I worked with them in pastoral care department.

During this time I was preaching in the Presbyterian churches of Western New York and then I received a call to minister at Wayside



Presbyterian church as a pastoral assistant for one year and a half. During my ministry at Wayside church I participated in the Peacemaking program PCUSA 2015-2016. I got a wonderful opportunity to visit several presbyteries and churches across the

US to share about life's journey and the situation in the Middle East especially about Iraq and Syria. It was such a great experience to learn and to encourage the churches to help the sister churches in the Middle East and stand together for justice and mercy.

Now, I am a member of the presbytery of Western New York and a full-time pastor at First United Presbyterian Church in Dunkirk NY.