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NEWS ▶			METRO ▶
ARTS ▶			BUSINESS ▶
SPORTS ▶			OPINION ▶
LIFESTYLE ▶			MAGAZINE ▶
INSIDERS ▶			TODAY'S PAPER ▶
LOTTERY ▶			OBITUARIES ▶
GLOBE NORTH ▶			GLOBE SOUTH ▶
GLOBE WEST ▶			TERROR AT THE MARATHON ▶
68 BLOCKS ▶			

Metro

Syrian crisis prompts bid by faithful to ease suffering

Church is raising funds for victims

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 04, 2013

 ARTICLE	 COMMENTS
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YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

The Rev. Timothy Ferguson spoke to parishioners on Sunday at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church of Boston.

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As a civil war rages in his home country, Syrian native Moussa Sallale knows his family in Damascus is under constant threat. Their next-door neighbor's house in the Syrian capital was destroyed by a missile. So was their church.

Sallale's nephew is lucky to be alive after having survived a kidnapping. His sister died when she was unable to get her diabetes medication in time.

"I'm heartbroken," Sallale, 85, of Westwood said Sunday night at an event at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in West Roxbury, where he and hundreds of congregants addressed their grief and feeling of helplessness.

After a prayer service, parishioners and religious leaders held a fund-raising dinner with the goal of helping Christians, a minority group in Syria who face constant persecution.

The congregation, made up largely of families with roots

in Syria and Lebanon, also hopes their gathering raises awareness of the ongoing violence in Syria.

“What a lot of people don’t understand about Syria is it’s the Christians that are under attack,” said Sallale’s son, Wayne, 54, of North Attleborough.

More than 100,000 people have died and more than 2 million people have fled Syria to neighboring countries, including Lebanon, since civil war broke out in the spring of 2011, according to recent news reports.

Christians, who represent about 10 percent of Syria’s population, say they have been hit particularly hard.

After the dinner was served Sunday night, speakers talked about the ongoing violence in Syria and the help needed there.

A series of photos, followed by several videos showing the destruction and devastation in the country, were displayed on a large screen in the church hall.

Salah Asfoura, 53, a native of Syria who lives in Worcester, said his father back home died two months ago because he could not get medical help.

Asfoura’s mother, his four brothers and two sisters, and their families still live there, in fear, he said.

“Even if you feel safe, it’s never 100 percent safe,” said Asfoura, who moved to the United States in 1992.

“You could be going about your business and get attacked or you might walk into gunfire or a suicide bomb,” he said, recalling the accounts of the violence told to him by members of his family.

Being so far from his family is “awful.”

“It’s devastating because it’s so hard to even get them money or to send other aid,” Asfoura said.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at Matthew.Rocheleau@globe.com.



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