



## Ready Response to Refugees

By Interim Missions Pastor Curt Miller

### **College Church Local Involvement**

College Church has long ministered to refugees and immigrants in our community, and our commitment today remains the same. Partnerships with local organizations like World Relief and the South Asian Friendship Center have given our volunteers access to cross-cultural friendships among previously unengaged populations. The Re:New Project and store provides community and employment to refugees and was started by College Church members. One of our missionaries, Emmanuel Tahear, a former refugee, plants churches among refugees locally.

### **College Church Global Involvement**

Globally, members of our missionary family serve this displaced population. In 2016, we took our first STAMP team to work inside a refugee camp, and we will be returning this year. Our Thanksgiving Eve Offering in 2016 went to support refugee work through Greater Europe Mission in Prague.

As a church, we are invested in welcoming and caring for refugees, but what is the biblical basis for this investment?

### **Biblical Context**

God cares for the foreigner. They were not to be mistreated (Lev. 19:33-34). The edges of the fields were to be left for those in need (Lev. 19:9-10). God defends the cause

of the fatherless and the widow (Deut. 10:18-19) and told the Israelites to love the foreigner. Why? Because they too had been foreigners in Egypt. They were to humbly recall both their difficult past and God's gracious rescue.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells a parable about those who will inherit the kingdom. To them, the blessed, Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." The word "stranger" means "foreigner." God has a habit of welcoming those who are physically or spiritually distant to himself, reminding his people to do the same. Ultimately, the character and work of God determine our response.

### **Current Cultural Context**

On January 27, 2017, a presidential executive order was released that contained this statement: "The Secretary of State shall suspend the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for 120 days." This put an immediate halt on U.S. refugee resettlement. One week later, a federal judge put a halt on that executive order, basically reopening U.S. borders. At the time of this writing, a new executive order is being drafted. With these contexts as background, here are five tips for engagement:

### **Tip 1 Brace for Complexity**

The incredible complexity of the "refugee crisis" should stop quick judgments and

volatile reactions toward others who disagree with our position. Even the term "refugee crisis" may add to the confusion as not all asylum seekers are refugees. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, a refugee is someone who has been "persecuted or fear[s] persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group."

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), approximately 65 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes while about 21 million fall into the refugee category. This number is the equivalent of populations from the seven largest U.S. cities being forced to leave their homes because of persecution. These folks originate from around the world, not just the Middle East, North Africa region. *Seeking Refuge* by Matthew Soerens and *The New Odyssey* by Patrick Kingsley are good resources.

### **Tip 2 Learn from the Global Church**

Here are a few examples of how our global partners have responded to this crisis:

- In Italy, Mark and Ruth Brucato's church provides translation of the service into English, cultural adaptation classes and Italian language classes. They have had an English Bible study for refugees and have been active in providing adequate clothing for them.

- In Austria, Jim and Lynette Hatcher's church began volunteering to serve dinner for 100 to 150 refugees at a local shelter and have developed good relationships there.

- In the Dominican Republic, Victor Trautwein and his team cared for Haitian refugees after the earthquake of 2010 by providing a hundred immigrant children with food, medicine, spiritual education and academic education regardless of their legal status.

- In Spain, Giles and Debbie Davis organized a small group to distribute meals, fresh clothing, blankets and personal hygiene products at the Macedonian/Serbian border.

### **Tip 3 Pray. Examine Your Heart. Then, pray again.**

God's Word reorients us to himself and helps us to pray biblical, Christ-centered prayers that he loves to answer. Refugees are real people who bear the image of God, and who now experiencing horrific difficulties. Pray for them.

Now, consider how you feel right now about this situation. Where do you fall on the spectrum of care? Do you share

God's heart for the foreigner and refugee? If not, confess that and ask God for the grace to grow your heart and to help you understand how he would like you to respond. Remember, we are servants and we are merely doing our duty (Luke 17:10).

### **Tip 4 Couple Discernment with Mercy**

God calls us to be discerning (Prov. 2:6) and merciful (Luke 6:36). Here's something that may be hard to read. A refugee from the Middle East and a U.S. citizen from the suburbs begin life in the same fallen nature and both are fully capable of grievous sin. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Both need Jesus more than anything else in the world and that should motivate us to respond.

With that being said, many of us are tempted to exchange discernment and mercy for so-called security. However, God does share that priority structure. For him, the gospel not going to the nations is a higher priority than our safety.

### **Tip 5 Think Journey Not Destination**

Be intentional by taking one step toward

a refugee. Alter your schedule. Make the visit. Have the conversation. Ask one question. Ask one more. Be kind. Smile when you see someone who does not look like you. Use the term "friend" instead of "refugee." Call your representative. Support STAMP Greece. Support global workers.

Volunteer with one of our local partner organizations serving refugees and immigrants:

- World Relief ([www.worldreliefdupage.org](http://www.worldreliefdupage.org))
- South Asian Friendship Center ([www.safcchicago.com](http://www.safcchicago.com))
- Re:New ([www.renewproject.org](http://www.renewproject.org))
- Outreach Community Center ([www.outreachcommunityministries.org](http://www.outreachcommunityministries.org))

God is in control and he is faithful. Our Lord Jesus, too, was a refugee. Join him in loving and reaching your refugee neighbors. Contact us at [missions@college-church.org](mailto:missions@college-church.org) for more information.

*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.*  
Acts 17:36