



# EXTENDING BEYOND

## Extending hospitality to refugees

A message from Stanley W. Green



**T**he Bible is an account of God's project in history. Embedded in the text are human sagas filled with despair, courage, desperation, fear, failure and frailty. In and through it all, the divine intent is to uncover the true nature

of God and to give us a glimpse of the purposes of God. The overarching message revealed in these accounts is this: At the heart of God is love, kindness and compassion. God's design is for healing and fullness of life to be the experience of all humanity and the entire creation. Accordingly, woven through the text are invitations to align with God's purposes of extending compassion, protection and care to those who are vulnerable and desperate. The widow and the alien, the oppressed and the stranger, the orphan and the refugee are mentioned again and again as those who, in their need, confront God-followers with the occasion to

demonstrate the authenticity of their faith. And, just in case we misperceive God's intent, **Jesus reminds us, at the very beginning of his public ministry, that the central charter for his mission focuses on the plight of the suffering and struggling** (the blind, the lame, the brokenhearted, the captives). Furthermore, Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that God is particularly concerned that the gospel is received as good news by the poor and the marginalized: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to announce good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to set at liberty the oppressed, to give recovery of sight to the blind, and to announce the year of Jubilee" (Luke 4:18-21).

Refugees are those who dare to migrate across borders. [They move from outside the margins into restricted space – space that is claimed as the preserve of those who are deemed to belong.] Refugees cross the boundaries that delineate who

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Valery and her family found a welcoming place to stay at Quito Mennonite Church while they were refugees in Ecuador. She is standing in the garden at the refugee house. Photo by Linda Shelly.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."

—Matthew 25:5

# Refugee work around the world

Meet our workers and partners



## United States



In many cities in the **United States**, Mennonite Voluntary Service workers provide asylum-seekers with resources to better navigate the United States legal system.

## Ecuador



In **Ecuador**, members at Quito Mennonite Church provide food, housing, and psychological help to refugees from Colombia. Gloria Showalter helps to teach peace to children and adults.

## Spain



In **Spain**, *Comunidad Anabautista Unida* (United Anabaptist Community) reaches out to the refugees in their neighborhood and offers Spanish lessons, hospitality, and friendship.

## Colombia



In **Colombia**, our partner, *Seminario Bíblico de Colombia* (Colombian Biblical Seminary), teaches biblical perspectives on peace and nonviolence in a culture wrought by civil war.

## France



In **France**, Juliet Kilpin helps to heal the trauma of war by listening to the stories of refugees.

## Côte d'Ivoire



In **Côte d'Ivoire**, Paco and Annette Castillo provide a home for children who are [often] traumatized by war. We also partner with *Faculte Theologique Evangelique de l'Alliance Chretien*, which works to equip church leaders to heal from the trauma of the violence.



## Germany



In **Germany**, David and Rebekka Stutzman are laying the foundation for an intercultural ministry in Mannheim, one of most diverse cities in the country.

## Turkey



In **Turkey**, an Iranian-American family works to share hope with refugees who have crossed the border from Iran. Pray for courage and safety as the family shares God's love with others.

## Australia



In **Australia**, Mark and Mary Horst advocate for refugee rights.

## Southeast Asia



In three **southeast Asian nations**, Mission Network workers serve with tribal groups that have been forced to leave their ancestral lands and resettle in villages with other tribes. Mission Network workers help to build schools and develop peacebuilding programs.



Photo provided

# Searching for hope

By Juliet Kilpin

**T**oday, Ermias, a 16-year-old Eritrean boy, cooked me a wonderful meal in the Calais refugee camp in Northern France. The wood took a long time to light as it was damp, but with a generous dousing of oil it flamed into life and cooked a dish of tomatoes, onions, chili and kidney beans. When it was cooked through, Ermias cleared a small table and covered it with a new garbage bag so it was clean. The frying pan was placed in the middle of the table and after a moment of silent thanks we broke bread together.

After the meal, Ermias poured water from a kettle so I could wash my sticky hands, just as he did to clean them earlier. The water ran down the muddy path into the rain puddle at the nearby roadside. This camp is so minimal—blackened pots on the bunker wall, mismatched chairs around the fire, damp smoky clothes hanging on a line longing for sunlight, shoes on the roof, and graffiti promises on the wall that “God is always with you.” A rusty child’s bike leans on the wall, such a valuable commodity when the nearest shop is over a mile away. Water is collected from standpipes dotted around the mile-square camp, which until recently accommodated 10,000 people.

Ermias is a credit to his mother and his country. Polite and so much more gentle than his trauma would predict, with great humor and good English. He would be an asset to any school, and is desperate for the education he has missed in his war-torn nation. I try to hold out hope for this dear boy, one year younger than my own daughter. But I fear for him. He hopes to legally reunite with his sister in the UK, but the process is excruciatingly and criminally slow. One night he may try to make his own way to the UK. Stories of people dying trying to board semis in Calais are heard most weeks these days.

I said goodbye and walked away. The thought of leaving a 16-year-old to sleep alone in this place made my stomach churn. I looked back and saw him sitting by his fire making tea. I wished I could spend the evening with him waiting for his friends to return after yet another failed attempt to get to the UK. But I couldn’t. “We do what we can do,” said a wise friend. It has become my mantra, but it never seems enough.

*Days after this reflection was written, the refugee camp was dismantled and 66 government buses transported migrants to one of two regions in France. Learn more about Ermias’ journey from Eritrea across the Saharan desert, the Mediterranean Sea, and the European alps, on our new website, [www.MennoniteMission.net](http://www.MennoniteMission.net).*

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is an insider and who is “other.” Since tribalism is the default expression by which we define social identity, too often negative depictions are constructed, and fear is employed in order to distinguish who belongs from those who don’t. This, however, is an unredeemed impulse. The prophetic tradition in the Older Testament and the evangelical strains of the New Testament bear resounding witness to the divine intent for compassion and care to characterize our response to the alien and stranger.

When I said “yes” to God’s call to ministry, I became a migrant. I was an outsider, whether in a separate language group and economic status (my ministry among poor, Afrikaans-speaking farm-laborers), or another country (Jamaica, where we were missionaries), or within a different culture (North American Mennonites). Each time I moved from what had become to a new setting, I faced the reality of being an outsider. On each occasion I longed for welcome and embrace, understanding that rejection and even exclusion was a distinct possibility. It is not surprising, thus, that I was drawn to the story of Ruth, her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her husband, Boaz. Ruth, a Moabite woman facing dire straits and great desperation as a widow, decides to accompany her destitute mother-in-law on her return to Israel. As Ruth crosses the border into a foreign land, she carries in her heart the question of every migrant: “What will my fate be? Will I face rejection by the ‘insiders?’”

The hope I find in this story is located in Naomi’s remembering what it felt like, many decades before, to be herself a stranger and alien. Inspired and instructed by that memory, Naomi embraces as her role the obligation to “look out” for the safety and well-being of this alien woman. Fulfilling her duty, Naomi, the Israelite, said to Ruth, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you so that all may be well with you” (Ruth 3:1). Naomi is determined that Ruth not only feel welcomed, but that her well-being is ensured. That commitment makes Naomi willing to take some risks related to a wealthy landowner of her tribe. Through Naomi’s diligence and care, Ruth receives not only hospitality, but also an inclusion that inserts this foreigner into the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). She is not only rendered an insider, but is given the highest honor of being incorporated into God’s divine plan in the lineage of Jesus.

A touching story, indeed. But it is more. Much more! I choose to believe that this story is also an instruction about how we are to relate to aliens and “outsiders.” Welcome, hospitality, compassion and care are hallmarks of the

## Join the action



**Befriend a refugee in your own community.**



**Write to Congress to ask that more refugees be welcomed into the United States.**



**Pray for refugees around the world.**



**Foster compassion in the next generation by sharing stories like Ermias’s.**



**Support Mission Network in its work with refugees.**

response of God’s people to those who have become refugees. This is the case whether persons have become refugees as a result of war, violence, suffering or struggle that propel them into the unfamiliar in search of a better land and life.

**Many of us, like Naomi, were, in a not-too-distant history, ourselves migrants and aliens.** We would do well to be instructed by our need for inclusion and hospitality [when that was our situation] so that we, too, can extend a welcome to those who are [strangers and] foreigners and neighbors today.

I am thrilled that Mennonite Mission Network is engaged in ministry with refugees in so many places in the world. Also, through our trauma healing work in West Africa, we assist those who are marginalized and vulnerable to experience the welcome and hospitality that God intends for all people. May we, in the spirit of Naomi, respond to the refugee, alien and stranger with the godly sentiment she demonstrated in her words: “... I need to seek some security for you so that all may be well with you.” ■

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