SHALOM!
A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION
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Responding to Refugees

IMAGINE THERE IS a credible threat on your infant son's life and you have been warned to leave the country. You quickly gather a few things and flee with your young family across the border into the country from which your ancestors escaped centuries before. You have no idea where you will live, how you will support your family, whether you'll be welcomed into this new country, or whether people will think you should have stayed where you were. You have faith that God will protect you, but life is still uncertain, scary, and unfamiliar. This new country is not home, and you don't know if or when you'll be able to go home again.

We all know how that story turned out. When there was no longer a threat to the child's life, Joseph was told to return to Israel with Mary and the young child Jesus. Yes, Jesus was a refugee—he was a foreigner in a strange land and probably depended on the hospitality of strangers.

When we think about the plight of refugees today, how might we view them differently if we thought one of them might be Jesus himself? In fact, aren't refugees exactly the kind of people Jesus was talking about when he said, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40)? Yet with regard to certain kinds of refugees from certain places, we're told we need to fear them, and not allow them into our countries and communities because they might hurt us or take jobs and resources from "our own." How is that responding to refugees as though they were Jesus himself?

The numbers are staggering and sobering. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 65.3 million forcibly displaced people in the world, 21.3 million of whom are refugees, and half of them are under the age of 18. Ten million are "stateless people" who are denied nationality and access to basic rights like education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement (www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html).

How to respond to refugees is not an easy question. While it seems obvious that Christian compassion and clear biblical commands require that we do something other than say no, it is true that there are legitimate concerns to address. This edition of *Shalom!* explores some of those concerns, tells the stories of people who were refugees themselves and/or are responding, offers some spiritual grounding, and dips briefly into the Brethren in Christ history of responding to refugees following the Vietnam War in the 1970s.

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself (Lev. 19:34).

Extend hospitality to strangers.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12: 13, 21).

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers (Heb. 13:2).

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

THIS ISSUE OF *SHALOM!*

A Place Called Home

by Ron Byler

OVER TWO YEARS ago, their house in Aleppo, Syria was completely destroyed. The family of six lived in another village for four months, and then they walked six days to the Jordan border, sometimes needing to dodge sniper bullets. They finally made it across the Syrian border into Jordan to a refugee camp with not a single possession but the clothes they wore. They feel alone in their new country and they want to go home to Syria.

There are more than 60 million people in the world who are called refugees or internally displaced people. Sixty million people, the highest number ever recorded, are not able, like we are, to live in their homes because of conflicts or disaster, many the result of conflicts that involve our own country.

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Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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For two months earlier this year, I traveled in Eastern Europe and the Middle East to Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is providing help with refugees and displaced people in all of these countries.

A second family I met in Jordan fled Qaraqosh, Iraq about the same time as the Syrian family. They lived in Erbil for two months, and while they weren't able to get any help with food or shelter, they were able to arrange to get a visa to go to Jordan. They now live in a small makeshift apartment on the fourth floor of another family's house, but they have no family of their own here. The wife has a sister in the United States but she isn't able to provide any assistance. The husband told me they'd go anywhere that would have them.

These two families from Syria and Iraq, and many tens of thousands more like them in the region, are part of the reason the population of countries like Jordan and Lebanon has mushroomed. In Jordan, the population has doubled to more than nine million people in the last 15 years. Lebanon, a country of just 4.5 million, hosts almost two million Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi refugees.

"To be a refugee is pain," one refugee told me in Jordan. "What you see is barbed wire and you're far away from home." I wondered what it would be like if my only dreams were like his for safety for his children and to find a place to call home.

The high number of refugees and displaced people have put an enormous stress on the infrastructure of these countries. With economies suffering because of the number of new people, many native born people are also suffering along with the refugees.

In eastern Ukraine, almost 1.5 million people have had to flee their homes. In Zaporizhzhia, where I was speaking to an MCC gathering of partners in the region, I met Vadim (not his real name), a pastor in the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine where bombing is an everyday occurrence and many people have lost their homes.

Vadim told me he had to wait eight hours at a military checkpoint before he was permitted to drive to Zaporizhzhia for the MCC summit. In his community, Vadim says the tanks are constantly going up and down the avenue. Young people are risking their lives while the shooting is going on to deliver food and blankets to people in need. The violence has brought the churches together, Vadim tells me, because they need to support each other.

During my sojourn with refugees, I found new power in the Psalms I read each day. Vadim told me the Psalms were important to him, too, because they were evidence of God's faithfulness and protection.

In Iraq, I met Father Douglas Bazi who provides leadership to the Mar Elia refugee center, just one of the 14 refugee camps in the Chaldean Catholic diocese of Erbil, Iraq. He says four Catholic and other church dioceses disappeared overnight when ISIS swept through the nearby Ninewah Plain in August 2014. Over 11,000 Christian families fled the Mosul region for Erbil and the surrounding area. The Christians are a small part (perhaps about 10 percent) of the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Christians, and other minority religious groups who suddenly found themselves homeless because of the war in the northern Kurdish region of the country.

More than 5,000 Iraqi families have already left Erbil for Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Many of the displaced families do not feel they will ever be able to go home, but they are also finding it difficult to find a new home. "If you cannot open your doors to my people, help my people stay here," Father Douglas tells me.

In Beirut, Lebanon, I met with several bishops of the Syrian Orthodox Church, one of MCC's primary partners in Syria. Bishop Selwanos offers us thanks on behalf of the families of Homs who have been assisted by MCC after their town was mostly destroyed by the bombing. He tells us that MCC's help over many years has made him view himself as partly Mennonite! Recent help from

MCC has included heaters for use during the winter season, cash supplements and hygiene kits.

Bishop Matta tells us about the thousands of families who have moved into Damascus because of the bombing in other parts of the country. He says that every day the church has to process more than 150 baptism certificates that are needed before people can migrate out of the country. He tells us that he wants his people to stay in Syria: "We love our country and if you want to help us, please help our people stay in Syria."

Bishop Matta told me, as families are fleeing and leaving everything they once called home, that the only thing they have to hold on to is the mercy of God. As he tells the story, I want to hold on to God's mercy as well.

Since the Syrian war began five years ago, MCC has spent about $35 million to relieve the suffering of Syrians, Iraqis and people in neighboring countries who have suffered from trauma, homelessness and hunger—the largest financial response in MCC's almost 100 years of existence.

Christians in the United States who care about displaced people in Eastern Europe and the Middle East can support humanitarian efforts in the region and urge their lawmakers to increase aid, welcome refugees, and stop sending weapons to all parties involved. We can pray for our brothers and sisters and for a compassionate response from our government and churches. We can support MCC's immigration education work that equips people to provide the legal assistance that families need to enter our country.

An MCC staff person recently recalls a Lutheran pastor in Palestine telling a group of North Americans that they share a responsibility to help Christians in the conflict there be able to stay in the land they call home. Christians want to stay in Palestine but they are being pushed out.

The pastor added, "We are not Christians here because of your missionary work. You are Christians because of us. We were Christians long before you were, and now, we need your support. Not in money, but in prayer, in moral support and in telling our story." Go home, he pleaded, and tell your churches about Palestine.

If it is true in Palestine, it is also true in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. Christians need our support to stay (and return) to their homes.

If it is true for Christians, it is also true for Jews, Muslims and all of the other religious and ethnic groups in these countries. As a Christian in North America, I believe we are called to help all people stay in the land they love. For the 60 million people in the world without a home, I want to pray and work for a peace that allows people to stay in the place they call home. Will you join me?

Ron Byler *is executive director of MCC U.S. The Brethren in Christ Church U.S. is one of MCC's member denominations.*

Finding Empathy Among a Sea of Refugees

by John Reitz

IT SEEMED LIKE a simple question that demanded no more than a straightforward answer. I was living in a country that is made up of 80 percent of people who come from somewhere else. Most of the countries of the world are represented in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). I was serving as staff chaplain at a Christian hospital where most of the employees are on work visas. The common question was, "What country are you from?" This time when I asked the question I was stunned with the answer, "I don't have a country." I knew that the answer demanded a conversation.

Over the next few years I would hear stories of many people who had been forced to leave their countries in order to escape war and persecution. Christian doctors in Iraq were being notified with an envelope that contained a letter and a bullet. In it they were given a choice: leave the country, convert to Islam, or be killed. This was the send-off that many received as they departed the country they loved. The plight of many Muslims was not any better. A good friend from Palestine told me the moving story of how his house was taken without any remuneration which led him on a journey through Jordan and finally to the UAE in order to find a place for his family.

The plight of refugees and an appropriate response was becoming much more than a political position for me. I was living in a part of the world where what you do is much more important than what you say. However, what was being said in my home country was creating more questions than answers. I knew that this was a humanity issue that would shake at my spiritual roots and the fruit that would fall to the ground would be evidence to others of the character of the tree.

There are no easy answers to the overwhelming tide of refugees and displaced people that plague our conflicted world. Solutions seem to be quickly washed away by a new wave of fear and panic. Anyone willing to get caught up in the sea of tension between preserving comfort and offering comfort will find a deep abyss of unsettled waters. Trying to find a position on issues of such importance without having serious deliberations of the heart usually leads to strong opinions without a compelling compassion.

A few years ago I experienced a personal retreat on the Island of Lindisfarne, just off the northern coast of England in the North Sea. I traveled to this tidal island on purpose, something I felt compelled to do. I wanted a place to contemplate my solidarity with humanity. More than anything I was looking forward to a meditative walk over the Pilgrims' Way. This is a three-mile walk from the mainland to the island when the sea is at low tide. From my first step into the gunk of the underbelly of the sea until I put my feet on dry ground, I knew I was on holy ground. When the tide is high the island is cut off from the mainland; however, when the tide

is low you see the connection. My heart was stirred by the thought that if you go low enough and if you are willing to get into the gunk of life, you find you are connected with the rest of the world. I realized on that day that it is much easier to hold positions in life during high tide than when the tide goes out and you enter the gunk with others.

You might imagine my sadness when I saw the picture of Aylan Kurdi, the lifeless 3-year-old lying on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Not only did Aylan put a face on the refugee problem for the world; he also exposed the deliberations of my own heart. The tide was out and I was able to see my connection to a little boy who was lost on the sea through no fault of his own. The words of John Donne became more than a poem – they became a reality: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."

Understanding my connection with the rest of humanity certainly moved me past the temptation of bartering one person's comfort for that of another. However, as you go deeper, the issue of what a person would be willing to give up on behalf of another is quickly approached. In a high season of terror and fear, the issue of displaced persons and refugees seems to call for "high tide" thinking. At times like this, people on islands and continents seem to like a lot of sea between the "us" and "them." It's good to remember that we follow a displaced Lord who overcame the gap between "us" and "them" in order to relate to humanity.

Henri Nouwen in his writing on compassion first introduced me to the idea of voluntary displacement on behalf of humanity. When Jesus came to earth it was a voluntary displacement from heaven to earth. As if to highlight the fact, when Jesus was about the age of Aylan, the holy family became refugees due to the political upheaval of the time. The principle of giving up comfort and safety on behalf of others is at the core of compassion. The call of discipleship may just move us to a position echoing throughout Nouwen's writing: "Voluntary displacement leads to compassionate living precisely because it moves us from positions of distinction to positions of sameness, from being in special places to being everywhere... It leads us to see with others what we could not see before, to feel with others what we could not feel before, to hear with others what we could not hear before" (*Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*).

When I returned to the U.S., I found I had returned to a greatly divided country. Nothing highlights the division quite like the viewpoints on what we should do about displaced persons. Most of the conversation deals with how we maintain our safety (and that is an important issue but not the biggest issue). However, this may be an opportune time to live out the call of God to value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests but the interests of others. I found along the way that it is much easier to hold an opinion or to put forth a position than it is to wrestle with the deliberations of the heart.

John Reitz *served for three and a half years with Cure International in the United Arab Emirates. He is currently interim pastor at the Dillsburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.*

Acting Strange: *How to Dispel the Myth of Stranger-ness*

By Becky and Gaby Garver

I LIKE MY car clean. But lately, the cup holders have been crowded with dried up coffee cups. They're not the paper kind you get at the drive-through, but mismatched crystal tumblers. They belong to Amira, one of my clients who insists on starting my mornings with a caffeine punch.

I (Gaby) am a case manager who works on resettling refugees in Lancaster, PA. I work with dozens of clients every month from all over the world. And while every refugee I've met has been unforgettable, some are more persistent in making me remember.

Amira has learned my routines. I never stay for coffee, just come to pick up and drop off, with conversation limited to car rides and doctors' offices. So, she works around it. She breaks tradition, and brings her steaming black brew to go.

What image comes to mind when you hear about refugees being resettled in your country, maybe even your town? (Please pause and find an image.)

Now think of where that image came from—a photo from the news, a collage of multiple sources, a neighbor, or a friend?

Does that image look anything like Amira?

Amira is from Homs, Syria, a city decimated by bombings and street warfare, made utterly uninhabitable. Moving to Lancaster was one option among few alternatives, yet Amira is making the best of it.

Our family has made multiple moves over the years. Unlike Amira, we moved of our own free will, packing up boxes and leaving behind intact homes. We were not forced out by bombings or persecution.

Yet fleeing for fear of life and limb is in our history. It may also be in yours. As Anabaptists, our ancestors were forced to flee their homeland, seek shelter and a chance to rebuild, in a country foreign to them all because of their religious beliefs.

> *"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt"* (Exodus 22:21).

In 2016, however, this history can seem far behind us. Few of us know what it's like to be a religious minority, and few of our friend groups include people of diverse faiths and cultures.

In the absence of personal connection to

those different than us, we are forced to rely on a media representation that thrives on fear and insecurity. The "stranger" becomes the "enemy."

In a 2011 PRRI survey, seven in 10 Americans stated they had seldom or never had a conversation with a Muslim in the past year. Who have you had conversations with in the past year? Our family recently moved to a new neighborhood, and we are recognizing the challenge of starting conversations, even with neighbors who aren't that different than us. We've found that the heart it takes to talk to a neighbor is the same heart it takes to talk to a refugee, whether Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian.

While we're still figuring the welcoming thing out ourselves, we do have a few strategies to pass along.

When groupthink becomes positive:

Sometimes, it's easier to commit to something when you have teammates. I (Becky) work in the office, assisting behind the scenes in the task of resettlement. One of the ways faith groups have shown their support of our clients is by becoming "Welcome Teams." These small teams offer physical and emotional support to our clients, including setting up their first American apartment, providing a homemade meal, offering transportation to doctor visits, and even giving driving lessons.

Through all this the Welcome Team members welcome the stranger, offering friendship and connection with a new culture. Soon smiles, food, laughter, and yes, coffee, is being exchanged. Is there a group you can team up with, whether at church, in your family or in your neighborhood?

Make room in the inn:

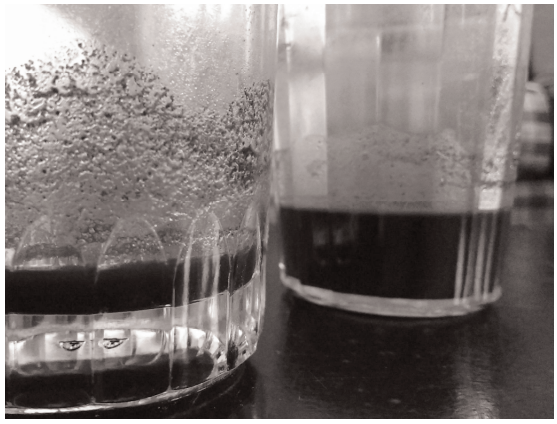
For how many days of the year is your spare bedroom occupied? Think about how you might steward that square footage on behalf of strangers. Seek out visiting exchange students, traveling business people, and yes, refugees in need of short-term housing. Or, consider filling a few seats around your Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner table with folks from another country. You'd be amazed how strangers can enrich the conversation, especially when it comes to the "say-what-you're-thankful-for" routine.

> *"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me"* (Mark 9:37).

You've got a friend in me:

This one starts with awareness and gets rolling with availability. The other day I saw a woman lugging flats of water bottles out of her car trunk, and I decided not to offer my free hands. Why not, I thought as I passed by. We all encounter a dozen opportunities every day to be a friend to a stranger, but we don't always have open eyes or willing hands.

Start by smiling at your cashier or striking up a conversation with the person in line with you. Work that muscle until you might consider being a family mentor to new immigrants. In Lancaster, individual volunteers come alongside refugee families, helping reschedule medical appointments, tutoring kids with homework, and even sorting out junk mail.



The coffee cups, and a Middle-Eastern style table of food.

As we engage those different from us, the images from the news media are replaced with faces of these once-strangers turned friends and neighbors.

For me (Becky), I've come to care about the strangers I work with as I would friends. Compassion and patience have increased for extra loud or smelly or depressed clients. The burqa has become a sign of devotion. When families come into the office seeking coats to ward off a September chill, I worry how they will manage when snow begins to fall. I've learned how to offer a genuine smile to express sincere warmth and welcome in place of cold indifference or rejection.

It's important to acknowledge that right now, refugees are a bit exotic. Everyone has something to say about them, and in some circles, doing nice things for them has become trendy. In reality, however, refugees have been with us for decades and will be here long after the media attention fades.

So, practice openness with everyone, not just the ones in the spotlight. On that day the stranger comes to your town, you'll be better prepared to offer assistance and friendship and to recognize they have a personal story of joys and fears, much like you and me.

But, be prepared for your car to get a little messy.

Becky and Gaby Garver, *mother and daughter, work for Church World Service in Lancaster, PA. Becky grew up attending the Zion (KS) Brethren in Christ Church, served in Venezuela with Brethren in Christ World Missions, and continues to live out her passion of helping vulnerable people. Gaby recently graduated from Indiana Wesleyan University with a B.S. in international relations. She spent her junior year of college working with refugees in Istanbul, Turkey, and last spring volunteered in a refugee camp is Lesvos, Greece. They both currently attend Mennonite churches in Lancaster. If you'd like to continue the conversation, email them at startaconversation2017@gmail.com.*

Editor's Note

Upcoming topics: Topics under consideration for 2017 include storytelling, religious freedom, being fully pro-life, and gender. Contact the editor if you have additional ideas or would like to write on any of these topics.

Doing the Work of Jesus

By Todd Lester

THE WESTHEIGHTS CHURCH, throughout its history, has embraced a vision of extending itself into the local community and around the world with the gospel of love and peace. One of the ways Westheights has incarnated the gospel is through sponsoring refugees from crisis-torn parts of the world; this response has included Laotian, Vietnamese, Sudanese and, now, Syrian refugees.

Why we do it: This commitment to engage in refugee settlement emerges from the theology and values of being Anabaptist. Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (Luke 4:18). We believe the things Jesus cared about, we must care about too; the people he served, we must serve as well. Jesus cared for and served the downtrodden and forgotten of society. For us, that includes refugees.

The Syrian context: In 2015, Canadians collectively grieved as we heard news that the ongoing Syrian crisis was worsening. The heart-breaking picture of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old who drowned in the Mediterranean while his family was seeking shelter in Europe, created a fervour in our national conscience that something had to be done. As a result, Canadians began responding to the Syrian crisis.

The leaders at Westheights, familiar with refugee resettlement work, recognized that we as the church could and should do our part in responding to this international crisis. But our previous experience with refugee settlement caused some trepidation. The leaders understood the cost involved, not just financial, but the costs of volunteerism during the long and unpredictable process of refugee resettlement. The challenge was presented to the congregation and 25 people joined a team to help resettle a Syrian family in Canada.

The budget: The funds required for the $30,000 budget came together very quickly as people responded. The Hollowell Brethren in Christ Church in Pennsylvania also contributed significantly to our initiative. Our refugee settlement became a binational partnership, something that we never dreamed of, but God did.

The challenge: Helping refugees assimilate into a new culture is not easy. Refugees experience dramatic change in a short time and they require help of all kinds. They need to learn how to use the systems and infrastructure of a developed nation (busing, school registration, health care)—things we take for granted are brand new for them. For the church, the settlement process involves moral and legal responsibilities. The Canadian government provides some funding in conjunction with a clear set of responsibilities and a commitment of one calendar year to help the family.

As we learned with previous sponsorships, even when the legal responsibilities (one year) come to an end, the moral responsibility continues. Love compels us to continue to care for the refugee family. With some previous sponsorships, our support and relationship carried on for many years, well after the legal requirements had ended, due to the unique challenges that were being faced by the refugee family.

The reward: The most important reward for being Good Samaritans to a refugee family is knowing that you have done the work of Jesus. Some of the short-term rewards, such as offering a family a more secure and prosperous life in Canada, are not always articulated by those you help. We know that although the reward is unseen, the work we do is the work of Christ.

On occasion, the reward is returned even in this world. Recently, I was invited to an event at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC); the speaker was Rudi Okot, an MCC worker from Lebanon. It was an emotional moment for me because Rudi is the oldest son of John Okot, whose family (John's wife, five children and sister) Westheights Church sponsored more than ten years ago. The Okot family had escaped from Sudan (now South Sudan) and fled to Kenya where they lived in a refugee camp. John Okot became the focus of persecution and escaped from Africa in fear for his life. He eventually found his way to Canada where he joined a Sudanese church in Kitchener that met in the Westheights building on Sunday afternoons. When the Westheights leaders heard John's story, we committed to reuniting his family. We sponsored the entire Okot family to come to Canada. And now, many years later, his son Rudi, a university graduate, is working in Lebanon with MCC helping the refugee population of that country. At his presentation at MCC, Rudi thanked God and Westheights Church for bringing his family to Canada. Rudi, who once was a refugee and is now helping refugees, completes the circle of hope that began when our church acted out of compassion.

Important partners: As Anabaptists we are very blessed to have MCC as a partner. MCC is an amazing organization that empowers churches and groups, and provides the instrumental brokering role with the civic authorities. Their expertise is tremendously helpful to churches that undertake a refugee settlement program.

The unexpected: Any pastor, myself included, would admit that we live in a time when overscheduled congregants have less time for church volunteerism. The idea of adding a large responsibility, like refugee settlement, to the church programming might seem unwise. But interestingly, our Syrian initiative has been 100 percent lay-led. The team of 25 people has sacrificially given hundreds of hours without any prompting from the leaders or the pastors of the church. They have made enormous efforts to ensure that the Syrian family has as much opportunity as possible to successfully integrate into Canadian life and prosperity.

Todd Lester *is senior pastor of the Westheights Church, Kitchener, ON, a BIC Canada congregation.*

A Resounding "Yes" to Refugees

By Wendy Adema

OVER THE PAST year it has been incredible to witness how communities, churches and other groups are responding with a resounding yes to welcoming newcomers through MCC's private sponsorship program in Ontario. MCC Ontario (MCCO) is now working with 240 groups across the province that are at various stages in the sponsorship process. To sponsor through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program, groups commit to provide financial and settlement support for one year. Settlement support entails securing and furnishing housing, orienting the family to the community, and connecting them to various services and supports like health care, English classes and settlement services.

It has been amazing to see how communities have rallied around the cause of creating a home for a family in need of a fresh start in a safe place. Through creative and inspiring means, fundraising goals have been met, housing has been found, homes have been set up, and settlement supports have been put in place. New relationships are being made and communities are being transformed. Glimpses of God's work are woven throughout this whole process.

"It was just amazing how it all came together," said Denise Bradden from an MCC sponsorship group in Niagara Region. "The larger community rallied behind the cause, and more than 50 percent of the funds for the sponsorship came from outside of the group. Sixteen people came forward to volunteer for everything from finding furniture to buying a condo for the family to live in."

Many of the refugee newcomers who have been coming to Canada over the past year are originally from Syria. In more than five years of ongoing conflict in Syria, approximately 400,000 people have died and more than 11 million have been displaced from their homes.

"We worked for this our whole life, to have our own house, and we lost everything. After the fighting, everything was destroyed," explained Maamou, a refugee newcomer who came to Ontario through MCC.

These newcomers were prioritised by the Canadian government as a population that needed to be resettled quickly given the ongoing strife in that region and the lack of other durable settlement solutions. However, Ontario has welcomed newcomers from other places too—like Eritrea, Sudan, Iraq, Congo, and Burma.

To be eligible to come to Canada through Private Sponsorship avenues or the Blended Visa Office Referral program, individuals must meet the criteria to be deemed a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and pass through various security and health screening tests. Many of the groups working with MCCO have had their newcomer families arrive. However, some are still waiting for a notice of arrival and approximately 50 groups are still waiting to be matched with a refugee family. So far in 2016, 578 newcomers have come to Ontario through MCC's private sponsorship program.

MCC is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with the Canadian federal government and as such, works in collaboration with local sponsorship groups to welcome and help settle refugees. In fact, MCC was one of the first signatories to the unique Sponsorship Agreement Holder program that developed in the late 1970s as a way to respond to the Vietnamese "boat people." Since that time, Canadians have brought more than 275,000 refugees to Canada through private sponsorship. Countries around the world are in conversation with the Canadian government to learn about the Private Sponsorship Program as it is seen to be one creative answer to the growing refugee crisis (see http://tinyurl.com/jya6rza). Faith-based organizations have been leaders in the Private Sponsorship Program in Canada as they are compelled by the biblical messages to show hospitality, welcome strangers, and love enemies and aliens. Christians have led the way in saying yes to newcomers, motivated by their faith and trusting that God will provide. Churches have decided to set aside their fears and reach out in ways that stretch them beyond their comfort zone. Hurdles have been overcome and paths have been made clear in beautiful and surprising ways. Some testimonies:

"We only get one life here. It's a crazy, beautiful, liberating thing to realize: We're not here to help ourselves to more—we're here to help others to real life. We're here to live beyond our base fears because our lives are based in Christ."

"Bible study friends donated bunk beds, a couple from church messaged that they had a line on a couch, a family our kids grew up with offered their backyard swing set, my sister made a list of what we all needed to set up a family running from war, running for their lives."

"A whole faith community put in hundreds of hours. Brave families of bold faith stepped out of their comfort zones for kids caught in war zones and worked and prayed and laughed too loud together and found comfort like they'd never experienced before."

MCC sponsor Ann Voskamp, in her recent blog, "A Holy Experience," said:

"We have seen that many individuals have been blessed through the process of sponsorship. Repeatedly those who volunteer to do this work tell us that their lives have been transformed through the new relationships that are formed. What starts as a giver-receiver relationship becomes one where the givers receive abundantly more than they can imagine.... As well, the staff at MCC Ontario repeatedly comment that it is such a blessing to be a part of this ministry where hospitality and hope are provided and lives are changed on a daily basis."

Thanks be to God!

Wendy Adema *is program director for MCC Ontario.*

From Refugee to Refugee Worker

By Rana Saba-Hekman

INSTABILITY. THAT'S THE first word that comes to mind when I think about the life of a refugee. My extended family—my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and my parents—were all made refugees in 1948 as the people of Palestine were forced from their homes. Seven hundred and fifty thousand Palestinians were made refugees in July 1948. Some Palestinian refugee families have lived in refugee camps for decades. Some families have lived in refugee camps and are forced to migrate over and over again, being made refugees many times over due to multiple wars.

My refugee family story

When my grandparents were expelled from their homes, orchards, olive oil soap factory, and businesses, they lost everything but family and God. Every. Thing. My paternal grandmother clung to the olive trees wailing in desperation for redemption as she was physically forced to leave her home and livelihood. Where was she going to go with 12 children? The days of forced expulsion were long and hot; there was no food or water in scorching, dry heat in the middle of July. Up and down hills families with the weight of war and the heaviness of their losses on their shoulders dragged their traumatized, confused, and terrified selves along a dry and rocky path inland from the Mediterranean sea town of Lydda into the inland village of Birzeit. My aunt told me how the family came upon ground "water" and drank from it. Then they realized it was not actually water but urine from local farm animals that had collected in a pool.

My grandparents, their 12 children, and several extended family members lived under trees for weeks, then rented a mud home, then rented a house across the street from what is now Birzeit University until they eventually resettled in a new city. Gaza was recommended as a good place because of its plentiful and affordable supply of fish from the Mediterranean.

Fast forward from 1948 Palestine to 1986 southern California. In 1986 I became a naturalized citizen of the United States, seven years after our family resettled here. No one becomes an American citizen overnight. The process is long, cumbersome, confusing, stressful, with lots of paper work, forms, questions, interviews, examinations, and study. I was 11 years old, and until then I had NEVER held citizenship in any country; I was considered stateless as a Palestinian refugee born in Baghdad, Iraq. The day we went for my parents' exam, we stood in many lines, waiting our turn for examinations, paperwork, and ceremony. Before naturalization day, my parents dilligently studied for the test, wondering whether my mother's English would be sufficient to pass the exam and whether they would remember the correct answers. I was afraid and worried. Our security felt very fragile.

Life was hard as a refugee. We were not assigned to a resettlement agency and were completely on our own to find affordable housing, go to doctor appointments for immunizations, or buy groceries; no one tutored us in English or taught us how to drive. We did not apply for government aid, such as food stamps or free lunches, even though we most certainly qualified. We did not know about these programs. My father worked 80-hour weeks to pay our mortgage and put food on the table. For the most part we ate well; my parents served us delicious meals with spices from home and memories that sustained us in our hyphenated identities.

We never went to the dentist or doctor, not because we were always in excellent health but because money was always tight and we didn't have insurance. It was not easy. My father was cheated by his business partner and lost everything again. Our life was full of stress, turmoil, and betrayal, even though we enjoyed delicious foods, picnics on the beach, and extended family gatherings. We nicknamed our home Grand Central Station because there was a never-ending flow of visitors, immigrants, refugees, exchange students, and young adults streaming into my mother's kitchen to feast on her delicious homemade meals or sit under the grape vines in our backyard while sipping Turkish coffee and visiting for hours with the usual protocols of Palestinian hospitality: fresh, roasted nuts and seeds, plates piled high with fresh fruit, tea with sage or mint, and Entenmann's coffee cake with cream cheese, newly adopted from American culture.

My first childhood memories of American life are of lazy weekday mornings watching countless episodes of "Bonanza"on my uncle Michele's television. Eventually I discovered "Wonder Woman" and would run around the house in my underwear and undershirt (I really wanted Wonder Woman underoos, of course) while singing and shouting, "WONDER WOMAN!"

I was so young when we arrived in the U.S. that I mostly remember the friendships I made with the other children after we moved into our own home. April had a dog named Willy, an amazing collection of Barbie dolls and clothes, a swing set, an above-ground pool, a small but engaging movie collection on giant discs that we watched over and over again, and pasta that came in a blue box that they called macaroni and cheese. Michelle's family lived in a beautifully decorated home with a massive grand piano, two sweet dogs, and exotic fish in a huge aquarium. As a young, ambitious refugee child, I enjoyed my time with Michelle's mom, Gloria, a beautiful and graceful woman and artist who engaged me in conversation and gave me a glimpse of a world beyond the daily hardships I and my family endured.

Working with refugees

When I think about what motivates me now to serve refugees, it seems like a no-brainer, thanks to my parents' example of generosity. My mother was always taking in women and their young children, giving them her time, her delicious meals, her friendship, her listening ear, space to heal. My dad was always quick to help the men with housing, employment, transportation,

business advice, and necessary government sponsorships and legal paperwork. Helping others is just what people do. There is no other way. This is is what my parents modeled.

Volunteering with refugees is not for the faint of heart. Refugees will disappoint you and fail you, even when you've worked dozens of hours to help them. In one small moment they may choose to reject your advice, and it might cost them a job, an education, time. Often refugee needs seem to have no end, especially when there is trauma, PTSD, or other mental illnesses. It's important to practice self-care and good boundaries, and recognize that you are only one person.

In my work with refugees, I search CraigsList for housing and jobs, I make phone calls on behalf of refugees, I set up appointments, job interviews, I shamelessly ask churches with kitchens to consider opening a refugee kitchen and encourage entrepreneurial refugee businesses. Does it always work out? No. But you keep going, helping refugees move toward to become established, stable, and secure. Don't take rejection personally. If one person refuses to accept a job you've found, offer it to someone else. If they complain that the ESL classes at the local mosque are weak, direct them to another option if there is one. If they complain that the cost of food is high, let them tag along with someone who enjoys shopping for bargains, introduce them to discount stories like Aldi, teach them to shop the grocery circulars, download the "Flipp" grocery store advertisement app, help them comparison-shop.

When I meet new refugees, I push what I jokingly call the "trinity": everybody needs to learn English, learn to drive and get a driver's license, and contribute to the family's income by working. Emphasis on everybody. Sometimes there is a reluctance to learn English. When I was teaching English to migrant workers in Michigan, I would often conduct lessons as they came in from the orchards after long grueling days and while they scrambled eggs and warmed up tortillas for dinner. It wasn't easy to engage students who were exhausted and hungry.

Every refugee situation is different. Some walk miles across borders and take risks on flimsy boats. Some live in refugee camps run by the UNHCR, some live in deserts with no aid at all, some seek asylum, some have been been traumatized by living under unrelenting military missile assault, while others from that same country lived in other areas that did not experience military airstrikes and have not experienced the first-hand trauma of military bombardment. Not all refugees fit the picture you see in the news. For sure, millions do fit that image, but others speak English, and were middle-upper class business owners and grocery store managers in their home country. Don't be surprised if refugees are picky about shoes and clothing; some have more fashion sense than you and I do! Hospitality, personal appearance, cleanliness of home, and personal hygiene are highly regarded practices, especially in Middle Eastern culture.

The most vital refugee needs are affordable housing and jobs that pay a living wage, followed by transportation, education, and healthcare, especially mental health care. There is so much I could say about mental health needs alone, but suffice it to say, extend grace. Extend grace, and of course your friendship and love as we love Jesus by loving our neighbor.

Rana Saba-Hekman *is part of the Palestinian Diaspora. Her family history goes back at least 20 generations in Palestine where family baptisms and weddings are archived in the Greek Orthodox Church's monastery in Jerusalem. She still has family in Gaza, Ravallah, and Ramle/Lydda. Rana, her husband, and two daughters attend the Madison Street Church (Brethren in Christ) in Riverside, CA.*

Fellow Travelers

By Zach Spidel

ONE OF THE most exhausting travel experiences of my life became, this last summer, one of my most cherished and remarkable memories—in large part thanks to two families of refugees.

My wife Becca and I were travelling back from the Brethren in Christ General Conference meeting in Florida. After a brief delay in Orlando, our plane took off and got us to the Chicago O'Hare International Airport in plenty of time for our 3:50 p.m. departure to the Cincinnati airport where our car was waiting for us. It was July 13 and I had several pressing matters as the director of the Memorial Holiness Camp (which began only two days later) waiting for me back home.

Due to a large incoming band of thunderstorms, our flight was delayed repeatedly. Around 9:30 p.m. they finally canceled not just our flight but every flight heading east from the airport and directed people to various customer service desks to rebook their flights. We joined the mad dash for a customer service line where we waited over two hours, only to discover that, at best, it would be two days until they could get us on a flight to Cincinnati.

As I (uselessly) pleaded with our customer service agent, I became aware of a distressing situation just a few feet away from me. Another agent was struggling to communicate with an obviously exhausted young couple from Africa. The young mother, carrying her three year-old daughter in her arms, spoke almost no English, and the broken and heavily-accented English of her husband was difficult for the agent to understand.

Their agent, in exasperation, turned to ours to say that she didn't know what to do. They were refugees who had spent every last

dime on their plane tickets. They had family members waiting for them in Cincinnati (they were bound where we were bound!) but no money to get accommodations for the two nights they would be stranded in Chicago. (Shamefully, United was not offering to pay for the rooms of any of us thus stranded.) The family looked so tired and sad and confused and not just a little bit frightened. As my attention drifted to this family in trouble, our agent suggested that if Becca and I really needed to get home more quickly we rent a car and drive (though they would not pay for the rental). I thanked our agent for the suggestion, and then Becca and I approached the African family and the agent still attempting to speak to them.

I explained I was going to be renting a car and driving to Cincinnati and we would like to offer them a ride. After wrestling to make myself understood to the young father, he explained the offer to his wife. While I could not understand their language, I could tell she did not want to accept—she was afraid, did not know us, and did not want to take a chance. The young man pulled out a paper with multiple phone numbers scrawled on it, and asked if, using my cell phone, I could call his cousin in Cincinnati.

This man's English was impeccable and in conversation with him I mentioned that I was a pastor. It turns out that he, and this young family, were fellow believers! I passed the phone back over and their cousin explained to them that I was a pastor. The young mother's face lit up hopefully and she said, in English, "Praise Jesus!" In a strange land it was a blessing to meet a brother and sister in Christ.

As we rushed off with this young family to find a car, I turned and shouted to the still-long line behind us about our plans to drive to Cincinnati through the night (it was after midnight now) and that if anyone wanted to join us and split the cost, they were welcome. An elderly couple immediately responded, "Oh, yes, yes!"

This couple spoke with a different accent. They were both retired physicians from Bolivia. They were Jews, and the wife's family had emigrated to Bolivia from Austria, narrowly escaping the Nazis following the annexation of Austria. She too had been a refugee and when she and her husband found out how we were helping our new friends from Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to be precise), they were eager to help.

These Jewish physicians (one of whom had been a refugee from Nazi Europe), this young family of African refugees, and Becca and I all piled into a rented minivan and spent the next seven hours traveling from Chicago to Cincinnati, trading stories, keeping one another awake, and working the phone together to get a partial refund for our African friends for the last leg of their flight. (They had flown from the DRC to Brussels to Chicago already—hence their exhaustion!) We shared McDonalds food, and Becca and I shared our faith in Jesus. Our Jewish friends were delighted to discover that we were Anabaptists, as they had delivered many babies for a community of Mennonites in Bolivia and admired their faith (and ours) very much. Together, as we drove, we watched the sun rise over the highway. Even as we drove I savored the beauty of the experience, exhausted though I was, and thanked God for allowing me to be part of such an encounter.

When we finally arrived in Cincinnati, I received a big hug from that young mother, "Praise Jesus!" beaming from ear to ear. There were hugs all around as we parted and a shared sense that this encounter had redeemed the mess of a situation we had been in. I hope that God will grant me more opportunities to travel alongside refugees and that he will help us, his Church, remember our calling to be fellow travelers with all those who are dispossessed, needy, or seeking a home. Such journeys convey unique blessings to all those who dare to undertake them.

Zach Spidel *is the pastor of The Shepherd's Table congregation in Dayton, OH.*

Radical Hospitality

By Luke Embree

I'VE ONLY RECENTLY started referring to myself as a Christian pacifist. For a long time my biggest problem with pacifism was a moral one. I questioned the effectiveness of "conscientious objection" in a world so characterized by violence and human suffering. I've since changed my mind. I realize now that my problem was with the way I defined "pacifism." I had mistaken it for "passivism" and that is an unfortunate association. Pacifism, properly understood, is the creation of peace; it is the proliferation of God's "shalom." It advances God's vision for human flourishing in a broken world. Far from being passive, it inserts itself into the very heart of conflict, seeking solutions that affirm the dignity of every individual. Today, one of the greatest points of human suffering and need in the world is being experienced by those we call refugees.

At Asbury Theological Seminary we are discovering that the best way we can speak "peace" into this current crisis is through the ministry of what we call "radical hospitality". We're all familiar with standard forms of hospitality. Thanksgiving is a prime example. We spend significant time preparing a lavish meal, baking desserts, and creating a comfortable space in which to invite our relatives and closest friends. Such practices enrich our lives by deepening the bonds we have with loved ones.

Radical hospitality, though, is a little bit different. At the heart of such hospitality is the desire to welcome those who are often excluded from the joys of family and friends. It seeks out those people who are lonely, lost, alienated, and marginalized in our society. It does this with the intention of affirming the humanity of each individual in the most enduring and self-giving way possible: through genuine, personal relationships. Radical hos-

pitality seeks out the "other" and transforms them into "brother and sister." Recently, we as a community have decided to practice this virtue by "adopting" a refugee family from Syria.

What is truly extraordinary about our experience, though, is the impact of this simple act of welcoming others in. The family we are sponsoring (for the sake of their privacy and security we'll call them the "Khalil family") lives in a modest apartment not far from the school. We volunteer as families and individuals with practical items like running them to doctor appointments or grocery trips. But our most remarkable experiences come from simply spending time with the Khalils. A friend of mine (Christopher) recently relayed one such experience about a time he and his family joined the Khalils for dinner.

They didn't realize it when they had been invited but the Khalil family was observing the season of Ramadan. What makes this so interesting is that Ramadan is a traditional time of fasting in the Islamic tradition. Families fast through the day and celebrate feasts at night. Christopher and his family, though, were treated as royalty. They were enthusiastically welcomed into the Khalils' home and, even though they were fasting, the Khalils hosted a lavish spread of hors d'oeuvres that included fresh fruits, olives, and cheeses. Even with a language barrier, they were able to joke and communicate the warmest hospitality. And that was the real irony of the evening.

Although the Khalils had been forced to abandon their home and their belongings, although they have left their friends, family, and nation, and entered our country as guests, they continue to extend hospitality to others. We the "hosts" find ourselves in the privileged position of "guests." And in these relationships that cross borders and cultures and languages and religions, we have discovered something that we hold in common. We have discovered that we need one another.

Perhaps this is why God unequivocally affirms his love for refugees and instructs his people to do the same. In Deuteronomy 10:18-19 we read, "[God] loves the resident foreigners, giving them food and clothing. So you must love the resident foreigners because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." God is doing much more in this text than just providing for others; he is transforming their very identity. He's saying, "You were once known as a displaced people. From now on, you will be known as a people of hospitality." Our response to those in need does not merely reflect our concern for others, but it also reflects who we are as a people. It reflects who we are as Christians because hospitality emanates from the very heart of God.

What, then, does this have to do with Christian pacifism? As stated above, Christian pacifism advances God's vision for human flourishing in a broken world. It does this by rushing to engage the enemies of dignity, decency, and humanity on the frontlines of human suffering. One of our most subversive tools in this war is the practice of radical hospitality. Every time we affirm the dignity of the other, each time we offer a place to rest, or develop a relationship modeled on God's love we are practicing hospitality—we are defeating the enemy. In the words of a dear friend and mentor Dr. Marilyn Elliot, "the Kingdom happens over hospitality."

In this respect, all hospitality is radical hospitality. Marilyn lays out some important considerations about the nature and power of this ministry. Hospitality does not stem from the extent of our resources or the condition of our circumstances; it is the overflow of a redeemed people, the lifestyle of a grateful heart. It can occur in the smallest of acts and the grandest of gestures. It is always a life-giving act that resonates with the heart of a hospitable God.

As our nation and world faces a surge of refugees and displaced persons, how might a Christian response of hospitality inform the conversation? In the history of our faith we may observe a robust heritage of Christians both extending and receiving hospitality in times of need. The book of Acts tells about the first Christians who were forced to flee their homes in the face of brutal persecution. Acts 8 begins: "Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the Apostles were forced to scatter across the regions of Samaria and Judea." In the course of time these Christian refugees found homes in locations across the Roman Empire, spreading the gospel everywhere they went. Some were welcomed into homes in Antioch where a great church was planted, nourishing the faith of such notable Christians as Barnabas and Paul. Perhaps it's with some sense of irony that we recognize that Antioch exists to this day—in Syria.

Refugees from around the world are searching for help, hope, and security. As Christians we have the opportunity to share these things and so much more. We can offer them an identity that transcends the status of "refugee." We can affirm them as God's children and invite them into the story of his self-giving love.

Luke Embree *and his family live in Wilmore, KY, where he is completing his Master's of Divinity at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is also a licensed Brethren in Christ minister and is looking forward to serving God in full-time ministry after he graduates in the spring.*

Endnotes for page 12

[1]The story of the Brubakers and their refugee foster children comes from Maralee A. Brubaker, "Stretching," *Evangelical Visitor,* May 10, 1981, 5.
[2]J. Wilmer Heisey, *The Cross Roads Story: A Brethren in Christ Community Living at the Threshold of Tomorrow* (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2004), 181.
[3]E. Morris Sider, *Celebration: A Centennial History of the Grantham Brethren in Christ* (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society), 256-258.
[4]Carolyn E. Pertusio, "Journey from Despair to Hope," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 10, 1979, 9-10; Carolyn E. Pertusio, "Some Do's and Don'ts Concerning Sponsorship," *Evangelical Visitor*, January 10, 1980, 5.
[5]Lois Jean Peterman, "The Quachs Go to Sunday School," *Evangelical Visitor,* July 10, 1980, 12.
[6]For instance, Grantham BIC went on to aid in the resettlement of several other Vietnamese families. See Sider, *Celebration*, 258-263.
[7]Pertusio, "Some Do's and Don'ts," 5.

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Opened Doors: *Caring for Refugees in the Wake of the Vietnam War*

By Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas

IN THE MONTHS and years after September 1975, when the Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to communist forces, U.S. news outlets began to air stories of refugees teeming out of southeast Asia. One Brethren in Christ pastor's wife, Maralee Brubaker, became deeply moved as she saw the "pleading faces and malnourished bodies" depicted in these news stories. She and her husband Verle, then the pastoral couple at the now-closed Oak Park BIC Church (Des Moines, Iowa), knew they had to respond in some tangible way.

Although the Brubakers were young parents of an 18-month-old son, they decided to open the two unoccupied rooms in their parsonage to refugees. They met their foster children—Van and Vu, teenaged orphans who had escaped Vietnam—in November 1979. Less than a year later, they welcomed two other Vietnamese refugees, including Van and Vu's brother Phat, into their home. The experience was not always easy, but in the process the Brubakers learned a valuable lesson in Christian discipleship. As Maralee wrote in 1981, "Expressing God's love in this way renders us vulnerable—sometimes to be hurt. [But] it is only in so doing that we are able to receive love."[1]

Expressing and receiving God's love by caring for refugees occupied the time and energy of many U.S. Christians in the years after the Vietnam War, when millions of displaced people searched desperately for new homes and new lives. Within this broader current, several BIC congregations responded to pleas to aid war refugees in their resettlement. For instance, in late 1975, members of Cross Roads BIC (Mt. Joy, Pa.) pooled their resources in order to help a seven-member Vietnamese family being relocated to the local community.[2] The Grantham (Pa) congregation made a similar decision that same year: church members worked together to secure housing and employment for a family that had escaped Vietnam on the same day that Saigon fell to communist forces; one couple from the congregation even taught the refugees English.[3] Similarly, in 1979, members of Palmyra (Pa.) BIC (now Encounter Church of Palmyra) sponsored the Vietnamese refugee Lu vin Ky, his brother Cuong, and four others members of Ky's family as they started new lives in central Pennsyvania.[4] That same year, the Wainfleet (ON) congregation sponsored the Quach family as they resettled in Port Colborne, ON.[5] In time, some of these newly settled U.S. and Canadian residents moved to different parts of the country; they built careers, purchased homes, and raised families. Meanwhile, some congregations continued to work with Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees well into the 1980s and beyond.[6]

Few BIC people in the 1970s and 1980s explicitly tied their work with refugees to the church's historic peace position. And yet, as Maralee Brubaker's comments point out, the same love for God and neighbor that fueled the church's refusal to take up arms against enemy nations also fueled their compassionate response to displaced peoples. One member of Palmyra BIC invoked a biblical precedent for this generous, self-giving love in an article on how to sponsor refugee families. "Let us not be guilty of the sin of the priest and the Levite, who, seeing someone in great need, passed by" she wrote. "[Rather, let us be like] the Good Samaritan, [and] let us offer our help and our resources to these people who have suffered so much."[7]

Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas *is a church historian and director of the Sider Institute for Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan Studies at Messiah College. He and his family attend the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.*

See endnotes on page 11.