

→ healthy church, healthy ministry

by Kim and Marc Wyatt, CBF Field Personnel

We began our current field assignment and partnership with CBFNC in the Research Triangle as Advocates for Internationals last fall. It is a blessing to be home. You might not know it, but Kim is from Durham. Somehow we didn't imagine our ministry being here, in Kim's hometown area. We are serving the same people groups we have

been on mission with since beginning our work in 1996. The only differences are that we understand the language, love the food, and can watch ACC sports on any given day of the week now.

Among the many peoples leaving their ancestral homelands to visit, study, work, and live here in North Carolina are refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention spells out that a refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Our country is among the most humanitarian, welcoming 70,000 refugees from around the world every year. These victims of persecution wait their turn in UN Refugee Camps or places outside their home country, oftentimes for many years, until they have been vetted safe for relocation by host countries. It is a long, slow, and humbling journey.

Here in North Carolina, approximately 2,500 refugees are welcomed and resettled annually. Those numbers will increase over the next two years as the U.S. and the world struggle to bring order and solutions to what is happening in places like Syria. In Syria, we are watching the worst humanitarian crisis unfold since World War II. Prayerfully we will not repeat the inhuman treatments of that terrible time when innocent people who survived brutal events back home were subjected to prejudice and suspicion as refugees.

Last night as we unpacked the events of our day, we recounted ministry encounters with 14 area congregations. That was some kind of record, we thought. God's people are a caring people. Yes, it isn't every day that we have that many churches involved with us in ministry to refugees, but it surely is connected to the response of Cooperative Baptists to the terrible things they are hearing and seeing on TV.

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Consider some of the ways our churches are welcoming and responding to the needs of refugees arriving in North Carolina:

First, Lumberton: The Children's Music Camp dedicated their Mission Offering to aid refugees in the Triangle. Along with their gifts, they made thank you cards for us to share with two refugee resettlement agencies. When we presented the cards, the grateful case workers were deeply touched. Now the children's sacred crayoned cards are nicely displayed at the desk of each refugee worker. And then, not to be out done, the youth made 50 "Congratulations on getting your first job in the U.S." gift bags for us to share with refugees when they get that all-too-important first job and step toward self-sufficiency. We've given out 30 gift bags to date.

Greystone, Raleigh: This church, one of our supporter churches, has fully furnished four apartments, even down to culturally appropriate foods in the refrigerator among many other acts of kindness as part of their "Pay It Forward" Mission Campaign for refugees this year.

St. John's, Raleigh: St. John's, another partner with us in Raleigh, hosted a family of nine Afghans to their Harvest Festival on October 31st. It was perhaps the first time in many years that these survivors of war had the opportunity to relax and play for a few hours with the loving members of the church. Even mom and dad joined in, had their faces painted with a pumpkin design, bobbed for apples, jumped in the jumpy castle and ate hot dogs (no pork), popcorn, and candy like their children. At one point in the day, they asked to see the inside of the church. I watched as they approached the front doors to the sanctuary, removed their shoes, and walked humbly into the House of Prayer for All Nations.

Oxford, Oxford: This church built 15 bunk beds for 30 refugees to have a place to sleep. Two of the bunks are at Welcome House. Because of their example, other churches are now building bunk beds too.

Loraine, a member of **Temple, Durham**, has become housemates with Marthe, a newcomer from Burundi after learning Asylum Seekers receive no government resources when they petition to stay in the U.S. Ms. Loraine, a faithful member of her church mission committee, told us that she wanted Marthe to call her Loraine but that this was culturally hard for her new friend who saw it as disrespectful. Marthe asked her elder host if she could call her Grandmother instead. Loraine went on to tell us she is never letting Marthe go.

Peace Haven, Winston-Salem: They held a Mosaic Worship with their Congolese refugee friends recently. Their discovery of thousands of refugees living only minutes from their church has opened a whole new sense of being on mission. You haven't worshipped like they do at Peace Haven until you've sung songs of praise in Swahili, danced traditional African worship style with Congolese children, or known the joy of sharing a covered dish meal with friends who ate banana pudding or broccoli casserole for the first time.

There are too many beautiful experiences we have shared this year to list in this story, but let's get together over a glass of sweet tea or ask us to share with your church and we will try.

A coalition of triangle churches have rallied to support the opening of Welcome House, a four bedroom, four bath apartment two blocks from NCSU in Raleigh. The reception home wraps arriving refugees with love and support while they wait up to six weeks for a long-term affordable place to live. We have hosted 17 guests since opening in late October. Each of these refugee friends now lives in their own apartment in the Raleigh area – apartments fully furnished by volunteers from our coalition.

While presidents, prime ministers, and governors are seeking ways to fend off terror in their part of the world, we say bombs and fences are not the solution. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10. We say the hope of the world is in joining God's work of bringing all people to a place in their lives when they reach out and find him although he is not far from any one of them or us, as Paul states in Acts 17:24-27. For those fleeing violence, persecution, and war around the world, we say help them rebuild their broken lives, welcome them into your life, and in so doing many when reaching for your hand will touch the incarnate Christ in you.

We are grateful to be serving alongside Linda Jones, the CBFNC Mission Council, and CBF churches in North Carolina. Join us as we welcome the nations. The mission field today just might be your hometown too. E-mail us at [wyatt@cbf.net](mailto:w Wyatt@cbf.net) if you have questions or if you'd like us to speak at your church.