



Triennial Assembly 2016 - Diakonia: Engaging God's Mission Open Space Notes

Refugees—Empowering in context of multicultural /multilingual congregations

Participants:

Judy DesHarnais—St. Paul, MN

Messiah Episcopal church

Has a large Karen refugee population from Burma who are now participating in worship

Linda Shelton—Houston, TX

Palmer Memorial and Diocesan Liaison to Episcopal Migration Ministries

Fatima Yakubu-Malis—Indianapolis

Member of church made up of 11 countries; works with Latino, Anglo and Burmese families; works with Food Pantry serving large area, met man serving refugees and business startups in Los Angeles; bishop connected her to Exodus, a resettlement agency in Indianapolis

Ken Boccino—Newark

Wife is from Guyana and “God drove him to work with refugees—specifically detainees in ICE Detention Center in New York”; now working with an asylum seeker from Ethiopia, began as result of writing a senior diaconal formation paper—First Friends Agency New York, began writing grants and now on board.

Phyllis Manoogian –California

Now working and living in Guatemala, teaching at risk children whose special needs get pushed to side: engendering enthusiasm in those previously under educated; also working with indigenous women in developing small business non-profit , tutoring, etc.

Recommended Books:

Undaunted by Zoya Phan

This Much I Can Tell You, compilation of refugees’ stories published by Minnesota Council of Churches

Discussion:

Understand the importance of not proselytizing; damage and resentment can occur when done. Must also recognize some refugees or immigrants come to churches desiring to continue participation in Anglican worship style they experienced in their home country or camp. Find ways to include, empower and encourage them:

1. Question of how to help
2. Meet with refugees—ask what they want
 - a. Various forms of assistance—jobs, food, filling out forms, assimilating hints, practical helps
 - b. Worship—Anglican worship experienced in camps and home countries and want to continue in tradition
 - c. Printed materials in their language

continued

- d. Inclusion in service—alternating languages in readings and prayers; Karen lectors
- e. Shared music experiences
- f. Inclusion in special observances—Palm Sunday readings of Passion
- g. Eucharistic Visits made using Karen language, printed service sheets
- h. Headphones and translation services/ readings

Challenges:

Language-- Some languages are more difficult to work with than others; few speak it and resources are few—example is Karen and Kareni languages of Burmese Karen people.

Direct translation services (ex. Google Translator) can be misunderstood—be careful!

Complex issues--Terms, laws and issues for migrants –Refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, undocumented people, unaccompanied child migrants, etc. are confusing and technical. (Make our discussion broad and difficult.) Hard for community to understand.

More information is needed of system and processes. Episcopal Migration Ministries website shared.

Collaboration with local resettlement agencies and support service agencies-- Learn needs, get specific information on ethnicities and nations of people coming to community—learn about them—example-- Food pantries could partner with multiple churches each asked to provide specific food items preferred by groups they serve. Bonus—less waste of food due to wrong sizes, govt requirements, unwanted items

Relational connection still most important and needed: even when helping refugees and immigrants with services, welcoming in worship, including in church, etc. Invisible walls still exist—how many church members socialize with refugees in their homes and vice versa?

Story Telling—human connection, understanding, leads to desire to help and identification with migrants—Thanksgiving—3 bags of ethnicity specific food given; Christmas—donations of regifted items for children to shop from for their parents

Political advocacy needed at this politically charged time.

Takes time—to learn, to connect, to build relationships, to inform others, to break down barriers.

Emphasis—God found variety of ways to connect and then call us to serving refugees , etc. Storytelling and face to face connection are needed.

Church can welcome through inviting full participation in all areas of worship and church life—including authentic growth of relationships (beyond parish hall coffee hour.)