



Working Together To Help Refugees

Earlier this month, a delegation of Disciples leaders traveled to D.C. to help protect refugees. Rev. Dr. Ike Nicholson, Senior Pastor of [South Suburban Church](#) in Littleton, Colorado, was part of that delegation and has this reflection to share. We are grateful for this congregation's faithful support of Week of Compassion, and for Dr. Nicholson's powerful story of welcome and compassion. The work that we do together is more important now than ever.

We boarded the Royal Jordanian Airliner on September 11, 2001.

As part of a delegation with Friends of Jordan-- an organization of U.S. clergy dedicated to economic development in Jordan-- we had spent the previous week meeting with business leaders and government officials throughout the small middle eastern Kingdom. We listened as government officials outlined their plan to combat militancy through economic development. They said, "If our people have hope, they will not embrace hate."

When we landed in Shannon, Ireland, we learned of the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, and of the brave passengers whose final resting place is now a field in Pennsylvania. For the next ten days, I was without a country, unable to get home, and had little money left over. I was a stranger in a strange land, where I knew no one.

The Jordanian government worked on our behalf to arrange housing and meals. When a retired Irish-Catholic priest heard about a group of clergy stranded at the airport, he made his way there and invited us back to his parish.

The community embraced us and welcomed us. The Jordanians fed us and housed us. That experience changed me. How could I ever repay the good people of Ireland and Jordan?

On September 11, 2019, I was given the chance to do just that.

Another delegation of clergy--this time from Colorado-- was invited to meet with members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees to advocate for refugee resettlement. I joined Rev. Joan Bell-Haynes, Regional Minister of the Central Rocky Mountain Region; Rev. Mark Pumphrey, pastor of First Christian Church in Greeley; and Nga Young-Sandoval, a refugee from Vietnam who currently works for the Colorado Department of Law. We traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with Senator Cory Gardner, Senator Michael Bennet, Representative Ken Buck and Representative Scott Tipton, all of Colorado.

The Immigration and Refugee crises are both mainstays in our current news cycle. While the two are related, they are very different designations.

Immigrants are individuals who choose to move to another country for many different reasons. Refugees are those who have been forced to flee their country because of war or persecution.

Of the 26 million Refugees from around the world, the U.S. has, on average, received 95,000 Refugees every year. This past year, that number dropped to 30,000. It has been suggested that the current administration may not allow any refugees into the country next year-- a plan that concerns the Department of Defense, the Department of State and both parties in Congress.

The Refugee Resettlement Program is integral in supporting our allies around the world, and remains critical to our nation's foreign policy. Each year, the administration consults with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees before setting the Refugee Admission numbers. Congressman Buck serves on that Committee. I was grateful to hear of his opposition to dropping the Refugee Admission number further, and hope that other legislators will make similar recommendations.

South Suburban Christian Church, where I serve as Senior Pastor, is a conservative evangelical congregation within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). While "mainline" and "evangelical" churches may hold different beliefs in some matters, on this, we agree: welcoming those who are persecuted is an essential ethic of our faith.

In that spirit, our congregation partners with refugee students at local high schools as they build a new life in our community. Most recently, we hosted a track meet, and a forum to hear the story of a teen refugee from Estonia. I can't imagine telling other young people fleeing war around the world that they are not welcome here.

Having received the welcome of others when I needed it most, I'm grateful for a Church that works together to extend hospitality to those in need of sanctuary. I'm grateful for [Refugee and Immigration Ministries](#) at Disciples Home Missions; for Week of Compassion and our partners at Church World Service and Refugee Council USA who are giving hope to those who have lived in fear for far too long. Together, we can change the lives of those who are far from home.

As legislators consider the refugee admissions goal for Fiscal Year 2020, some officials have proposed resettling zero refugees next year. The current administration has been downsizing the resettlement program already, and plans to grant states and localities the authority to deny refugee resettlement in their communities-- undermining U.S. law and violating our nation's commitment to welcome the most vulnerable.

It is critical that members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, charged with consulting the administration, hear the faith community strongly condemn a low admissions goal and call for a robust admissions goal in FY20. For this reason, Disciples leaders from key states were willing to give their time to go to D.C., making the voice of our wider church heard.

Mission

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