

Report of the World Relief Officer to the World Relief Committee
November 2, 2018

RETHINKING LABELS

Labels. We all have them. Some represent our familial relationships—mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son, wife, husband. Some represent our faith—Christian, Muslim, Buddhist. Others represent our occupation—pastor, farmer, doctor, caregiver.

Most of the time we get the labels for each other right. But what about when we get it wrong and the label isn't a positive one?

I've been thinking a lot about labels lately—especially the labels of the narrative that are used to describe the 258 million people worldwide that are outside of their country of origin—those that make up the global migration happening today. Here are the labels I've heard:

Refugee. Asylum Seeker. Illegal Alien. Migrant. Immigrant. And yes, sometimes even *Criminal*.

It can be easy to confuse these labels—and some, like refugee and asylum seek, have internationally recognized and distinct definitions that carry with it specific safeguards and protections. I've heard these labels used interchangeably, and sometimes that's accurate, for the person who is a migrant today can become a refugee tomorrow, if they qualify.

And so, I've wondered, is the reason that a person is fleeing violence, disaster, injustice or economic poverty relevant? Regardless of the reason for their flight, do they not face the same conditions in their journey to their destination? At a Church World Service meeting last week, a presenter on the topic of Global Migration shared this: "When two migrants undertake a treacherous voyage, for example across the Mediterranean or through the Sonoran Desert, their vulnerabilities in transit may be nearly identical, even if subsequent status determination recognizes one of them, but not the other, as a refugee." He went on to comment on what has become the narrative around the use of two labels, "Refugees are victims. Migrants are opportunists."

Wow. That hit me like a ton of bricks. And not "Wow!" in a good way, but "Wow." in the confessional way. I needed to ask myself if that is a narrative that I have agreed with in any way—through my thoughts or actions. How have I labeled people forced to leave their homes, regardless of the reason? As a Christian, I've understood Jesus to say, "Welcome the stranger" (Matthew 25:35) without qualification. He didn't say "Welcome the refugee but not the migrant." Or "Welcome the asylum seeker but not the illegal alien." He simply said that I will have "seen" him when I welcome the stranger.

One Great Hour of Sharing has been defined as the annual offering "...to enable and encourage (a) emergency relief and disaster rehabilitation, (b) refugee work, and (c) development assistance in the name of Jesus Christ..." I believe this made sense for the many decades when the primary way in which churches in the U.S. could assist was with resettling refugees. Today global migration is much more complex and the opportunity to resettle refugees within the U.S. is much more limited. For the

Fiscal Year 2018, the U.S. government has committed to resettle a maximum of only 30,000 refugees—that's only .01% of the 25.4 million refugees around the world. We know that the number of people in the midst of the global migration that carry a label other than "refugee" far outnumber those that are labeled refugee. Can we be challenged today to expand the focus of our OGHS intervention from solely "refugees" or even "refugees and immigrants" to ALL "migrants"?

What we know is this: There are 258 million people worldwide—migrants—that are somewhere other than their home. If we think of all 258 million people as migrants—no further label and no further judgment—can we see them as worthy of our compassionate response—the response Jesus calls us to? Will we make a choice to change the narrative of "migrants are opportunists" to a positive one that recognizes the person—child, woman or man—as one facing vulnerability and worthy of our support through One Great Hour of Sharing? I look forward to discussing this with the World Relief Committee when we meet on November 8, 2018.

Report on 2018 Year-to-Date Undesignated Giving

Year-to-date undesignated receipts through September 2018 totaled \$834,511 compared with \$853,670 for the same period last year. That represents a 2.2% decrease.

World Relief Committee Meeting – November 8, 2018

At its' upcoming meeting, the World Relief Committee will approve the overall 2018 OGHS budget, consider new development projects presented by ABHMS and IM, ecumenical commitments to Church World Service, the ACT Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and the World Relief Office Administrative Budget.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Rothenberger
World Relief Officer