

## **FYI: Report of the World Relief Officer**

### **Report of the World Relief Officer to the World Relief Committee June 2, 2016**

Refugee. Immigrant. Asylum Seeker. It's difficult to tune into the nightly news or the 24-hour news channels and not encounter these terms. I say "terms" because in this confusing political landscape, at times it feels like we've lost sight of the fact that these "terms" refer to real people—an unprecedented number of people worldwide who are displaced from the place they call home.

The theme of the 2016 One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) materials is the displaced people of our world. There is much to be learned—and many needs to be met—as this chronic disaster is unfolding right before our eyes. The response to the theme has been mixed. Some churches have shared that it is very helpful and relevant to their congregational life and education, while others have seen our response to Syrian and Middle East refugees as aiding and abetting the enemy. These are confusing times we are living in. I anticipated that this theme might be challenging for some, as it's difficult to sort through the messages that our media, and now our presidential candidates, provide on a daily basis.

And still, I believe it is an important topic to unpack in a responsible way. Today, only .5% of all refugees can hope to be resettled in the U.S. Yes, that is correct—only ½ of 1%. For the millions of others, resettlement, to a small degree, will happen to other countries. The vast majority of the displaced will remain displaced for years or even decades. They will remain in camps or informal settlements where food and water are in short supply, the living conditions are crowded and unclean, and there are few, if any, opportunities for their children to continue their education. Overall, life is bleak.

What will be our response to the current unprecedented global displaced persons' crisis—the worse since these statistics began to be recorded? Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said in early 2015, "We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before."

Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum (June 2015). If this were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th biggest. And the outlook is not improving. Wars continue to be waged and the people caught in the middle become more desperate to reestablish some semblance of normalcy to their lives. This desperation was evident in late Summer/early Fall 2015 as Syrian refugees and others began the arduous trek through Greece and Turkey hoping to make it to a hospitable country before the Winter cold set in.

Honestly, the "unchecked slide" into this unprecedented era of forced displacement raises many questions but not many answers. The world is waking up to what this will require of us—churches, governments, the United Nations, and more—to enable people to return home or provide durable solutions close to where they are stuck today. Languishing in camps and informal settlements will not be an option for all that are displaced. We will need together to find new answers to this pressing challenge.

For now, your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing are helping in tangible ways. They are helping:

- Syrian and Middle East refugees in Lebanon, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and Greece,

## **FYI: Report of the World Relief Officer**

- The small percentage of people who are being accepted for resettlement in the U.S.,
- The internally displaced in South Sudan, even as they brace for the outbreak of more civil conflict; and
- More, as the needs will continue to reveal themselves in the coming years.

The challenge that I see, as it relates to our own ministry through OGHS, is that we have come to see/understand OGHS as the “disaster” offering, but do not yet see this chronic situation of displaced people as a disaster. It is. It contains most of the same consequences of a natural disaster, but is all the more tragic because it is of human origin. How will we come to see forcibly displaced people as in need of our support as much as those who have experienced a natural disaster?

If you haven’t had the chance recently to read about this unprecedented time we are living through, I recommend to you “World at War” <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html> – the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends report on forced displacement in 2014. This resource was published one year ago (June 2015) and is a great resource for statistics and facts about the unprecedented number of people that have been forcibly displaced from their homes. It also provides definitions of the various terms used to categorize the forcibly displaced—refugee, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum-seekers, stateless persons.

### Financial Report on FYE 2015

The \$1,666,547 received by OGHS in 2015 represents a \$213,133 increase compared to prior year giving. The increase was driven mostly by the response to the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

Undesignated giving totaled \$1,165,031 which represents a 1% decrease from the year prior.

World Relief Office administrative expenses totaled \$98,094 and the World Relief Committee expenses were \$3,629 for a combined total of 6% of receipts. Promotional expenses were \$64,020 or 4% of receipts. Cash reserves decreased from a fiscal year-end 2014 balance of \$462,885 to \$412,392 at the end of 2015.

### Report on 2016 Year-to-Date Giving

Year-to-date receipts through April 2016 totaled \$118,331 compared with \$163,667 for the same period last year. The major difference is the YTD April 2015 giving included \$26,092 designated to Ebola Relief, \$12,771 designated to Nepal Earthquake Relief, and 7,000 to Syria Relief.

### Other Important Items of Interest

2016 OGHS promotional materials were mailed to all churches the first week of April. The materials included a Planning & Resource Guide, poster, bulletin inserts, offering envelopes, and refugee tent-shaped coin boxes. The materials were sent to the 2,294 American Baptist churches that have requested to receive them.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Rothenberger  
World Relief Officer