

Hope for the Homeless Pilgrims

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Twelve years ago, my family embraced an Arab family from Sudan. This family consisted of a widower with four teenaged children and his elderly mother-in-law. They arrived in Canada as refugees after fleeing from war-torn Sudan via three years as exiles in Egypt.

The First Filipino Alliance Church (FFAC) in Edmonton, Alberta [Canada], which I was then serving as Senior Pastor, also "adopted" this family and assisted them in many practical ways. This brother, Bill, (pseudonym) ultimately became one of my trusted staff members, serving FFAC as InterCultural Coordinator "responsible for community outreach to the growing Arabic and Sudanese community in Edmonton. Today, he continues to minister to his diaspora countrymen not just in Edmonton but across Canada. Through his personal witness and dedicated service he has led many diaspora Sudanese to Jesus Christ. His home has become a place of gathering --- prayer gathering, discipleship gathering, and feasting gatherings!

Recently, I visited Edmonton from another Canadian city. My Sudanese friend came to pick me at the airport. As soon as I got into his car, I asked "Brother, how are you and the family?" He replied: "Pastor, my oldest daughter is now happily married to a medical doctor and both of them are in northern Sudan serving the Lord in our homeland. My second daughter is getting married to a godly Palestinian man and both of them will be living and working as "tentmakers" in United Arab Emirates. My third daughter is almost done with her business degree. My only son is now married to a beautiful Christian from Bangladesh and both of them are reaching out to new immigrants from South East Asia." (There was a silence that followed while he was navigating the congested highway towards downtown Edmonton). I asked, "How is grandma?" "Oh," he replied, "she is at "home" -- at home with the Lord in heaven? she was a wonderful woman like my wife who went home ahead of her."

Imagine? Pause for a moment and ponder on these questions: What if the Canadian government did not open their national door for this refugee family? What if my own family did not love and care for Bill, his mother-in-law and his children when they just arrived in our city of Edmonton? What if FFAC, simply ministered to Filipino-Canadians and left alone the refugees and new landed immigrants from Arab lands? What if I did not recruit this brother and take him under "my wings" and mentor him to become my Assistant Pastor? What if we did not support them during their beginnings in Canada?

Today, the entire family is serving the Master. The children have gone into cross-cultural ministries back home, in UAE, and in Edmonton. Their grandma is now in her Eternal home with her daughter -- my brother's beloved wife. Pilgrims from Sudan, to Egypt, to Canada and ultimately to the City of God!

This narrative is a story of hope in the midst of our broken world; it is an assurance of a blessed hope for those who love Jesus Christ. It is a story of courageous pilgrims, and their life experiences on the highways. But it is also a documented report of a hospitable nation (Canadians), a hospitable city (Edmonton), a hospitable Filipino congregation and a gracious servant-leadership.

Diaspora missions is concerned about the flight of the people on the move such as the Refugees and the Internally Displaced people (IDP). Refugee ministries go beyond providing clothes and shelter, "fish" and "bread." It must demonstrate hospitality at all levels i.e. national, community, ecclesiological, and personal! The message of hope must be emphatically communicated to the People on the Highways --- hope for those being pushed out of their community and homeland; hope for those who are on the road to a new land, and the hope of Heaven!

From July 13 to 16, the North American Roundtable for The Refugee Highway Partnership will be convened at the Trinity College, University of Toronto. May I commend this movement to the global readers of Lausanne and World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). For more information visit www.refugeehighway.net The Lausanne III in Cape Town will deal with this particular issue at different levels e.g. Diaspora Multiplex, and Plenary session when the ?suffering people? will be presented. The Lausanne Movement is committed to take the Whole Gospel by the Whole Church to the Whole World including those who are homeless pilgrims.

*(Photo Credit: Flickr: JavierPsilocybin)