New Roots Review

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NEW ROOTS MINISTRY

Many of Our Faith-Forefathers were Refugees & Immigrants *by Fred Wilgenburg*

Abraham obeyed God and became an immigrant to Israel, even though as a 75 year-old man, his life seemed stable enough in Haran. Moses was on an exodus from Egypt, living with his people in the desert for forty years, without a home, like refugees. Ruth of Moab immigrated to Israel and became an ancestor in the line of Jesus. She was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, an Israelite woman, who, with her husband and sons had to leave Israel and go to the foreign land of Moab because of a famine. After the deaths of her husband and sons in Moab, an embittered Naomi returned to Israel with her daughter-in-law Ruth, and her hope in God was restored. Great people of God like Esther, Daniel, and Nehemiah also lived in exile, away from their home country, like refugees. God ministered well through these people, and I believe that in part it was because of their life experiences, and their refined faith and trust in God that developed through those tough experiences.

Our October 30 event on Immigration, which we co-hosted with the Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church, was well-attended, and well done by the speakers. Jason Lief, a professor at Northwestern College (Iowa) was the key-note speaker. His three Dreamer-friends, who personally deal with DACA policies, rounded out his speech.

At New Roots Ministry, we are blessed to work with immigrants and former refugees who have come to Sioux Falls within the last 25 years. Like the people of the Bible described above, many of our friends have had difficult life experiences of which I cannot imagine, often having left loved ones in dire situations, and with the possibility that they will never see them again. Many of them are brothers and sisters of Abraham, Ruth, and the others within the family of God, having a refined, matured faith in God due to their experiences. Most of them have a healthy global perspective, in which they appreciate their new-found home, the US, but they continue to have a love for their home country, so they send much money to loved ones still there. Some of them have begun non-profit ministries in, or on behalf of, their home countries. *For your information, the countries where people had to leave as refugees in the last 25 years, and have come to Sioux Falls, include the following: from Africa, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Dem. Republic of Congo, & Liberia; from Asia, Bhutan; from Europe, Ukraine & Bosnia. Many others have come from Latin American countries like Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, often under much duress, but not under the status of "refugee."*

Having their life experiences, a matured faith, and being bi– or multi-lingual and culturally- ***(—>)***

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Fred often has friends, who are originally of other countries, speak with him in churches. Board member Melke (top-left) speaks about her native Ethiopia. Christian and Anthony speak of the conditions in their home country of Liberia.

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competent, many refugees and immigrants are primed to potentially become effective missionaries for God, and ambassadors of good will within His world. But, as some of them lack theological education, New Roots Ministry is a site that offers Timothy Leadership Training (www.tlti.org). As well, since navigating the unique systems (housing, medical, finances, stores, school, etc.) in a new country is challenging, we are excited to help in this way as well. While Lutheran Social Services' Center for New Americans in Sioux Falls helps refugees during their first year in learning the systems listed above, **we at New Roots Ministry are excited to soon begin formally helping people to navigate the system of higher education and other opportunities for empowerment. Our board member, Rod Ledeboer, will soon retire from the Board and then he will put time each week into helping our friends, as described. With his experiences as a missionary, his leadership in non-profits, and his abilities as a teacher, Rod is uniquely qualified to help us get this off the ground.**

Many refugees and immigrants have unique abilities, good intellect, some education, and a sense of vision and call from God to serve Him, but they wonder: 1) which courses that I've taken in my home country are accepted by which colleges in the US? 2) I want to do more, but as I work 50+ hours/week, usually 6 days/week at the pork packing plant to provide for my family here and to meet the demands of sending money to my family members still in refugee camps, how can I possibly get it done? 3) I have the burning desire in my heart to meet the needs of my people, but how can I mobilize others so we can multiply efforts and results?

New Roots Ministry will now be better positioned to help people answer those questions.

I encourage you, and/or your congregation, to get to know immigrants and refugees among you! Be inspired by them; learn from them, and teach them; become friends and bless each other. Throughout this newsletter, I have included opportunities that we offer in helping with that, as well as ideas.

What is New Roots Ministry?

It's **"a springboard for immigrants & their churches."** This is done through **workplace chaplaincy** (both as Fred is chaplain for 17 hours/week at Smithfield Foods & as we are training & placing bilingual chaplains on commercial farms), through **Timothy Leadership Training**, through **hosting special educational events**, through **empowering refugee/immigrant pastors, leaders, and their churches**—they speak with us in churches, we send a newsletter, we find partnering churches, we advise on the development of ministries, through offering **unique Service Opportunities—serve in a store owned by refugees or immigrants, then hear their stories**, and our newest thing, **through helping individuals strategically plan for achieving their goals, including higher education if needed.**