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THE CHURCH'S CALL TO MINISTER TO REUGEES:
A CASE STUDY ON LIBERIAN REFUGEES IN MINNESOTA

by
REVEREND RUFUS KUDEE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Luther Seminary
In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
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THESIS ADVISER: DR. MARK GRANQUIST

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

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PREFACE

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).¹

The paper focuses on the different ways of adequately ministering to Liberian refugee families in Minnesota. The impunity of the Liberian civil war resulted in an exodus of refugees who eventually found their way to the United States, particularly the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis in Minnesota. However, they are facing enormous challenges, from linguistic and cultural barriers to education and job prospects, from physical and mental healthcare challenges to inadequate housing and transportation options. The mission of the Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLMN) is to provide social services to immigrants and refugees in the areas of education, housing, health, employment and other social initiatives.²

Ministering to refugees has biblical foundations both in the Old and New Testament of the Bible. However, Christian Americans who minister to the refugees should proceed in three ways: concerted inter-church and inter-community actions, Bible-guided multi-level support, and a listening ear. Moreover, ministers face two challenges: adequate financial support and a language gap. And, yet, Christian Americans should respond to the call of ministering to their foreign brethren and recognize that Christianity is about building bridges instead of walls. When one considers the plight of war refugees, one must first counter a perspective that has become

¹ All Scripture quotes are from NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

² The Organization of Liberians in Minnesota, “About OLMN,” www.olmn.org (accessed October 20, 2018).

highly corrosive in American politics: the image of the refugee as someone who comes to plunder the riches that are the right of the American people. Such a perspective ignores the fact many people who became Americans, including the founding fathers, came to America in search for better opportunities than those available to them in their homeland of origin. Refugees are destitute of their food, dignity, belonging, and land.

Each year thousands of individuals and their families worldwide are displaced by various factors, for instance, famine, war, political instabilities, and civil unrest. Thousands of such refugees have been getting into Minnesota since the early 1990s. In the process, the state of Minnesota is now home to the largest Liberian population in the United States of America. Hirsi Ibrahim writes, "From Spoken Word to Song And Dance a Day for Refugees to Have Their Say" states that diverse cultural performances including dance, songs, and colorful cosmetics are showcased by members of this type of population in Minnesota.³

The refugee issue is a very challenging situation not only in the United States but worldwide. Mainly women and children are faced with life- threatening conditions which leave them with no other option rather than to search for asylum in other countries. Many also fear religion, race and nationality persecutions. This forces them to leave behind very significant possessions, family, traditions, and their homeland. Even in the host countries, the refugees find themselves in a state of anticipation and challenges.

Liberia was affected by the civil war for a long period of time, and as a result, the citizens migrated *en masse* in search of safety and security to various foreign countries. Some of the refugees from the country migrated to Minnesota in the US in the hope that the war would abate

³ Ibrahim Hirsi, "From Spoken Word to Song And Dance, a Day for Refugees to Have Their Say." *Minnpost*, <https://www.minnpost.com/community-sketchbook/2014/06/spoken-word-song-and-dance-day-refugees-have-their-say> (accessed August 20, 2018).

so they return to their home country. However, as the refugees settled in Minnesota, the horrific experiences that they had faced led to post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), hence influencing every aspect of their lives. Having witnessed great massacres in their villages, towns, cities, and counties, the refugees were traumatized from the devastating effects. Some Liberian refugees in Minnesota have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the civil war in Liberia.

The paper is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one explores a brief historical background of the Liberian Refugee Crisis. Chapter two discusses ministering to the refugees: a Biblical foundation. Chapter three quickly reviews different ways of ministering to Liberian refugee families. Chapter four identifies challenges that refugees face. Chapter five explores the potential blessings that refugees bring. Chapter six highlights the Post-Traumatic Street Disorder among refugees. Finally, chapter seven addresses the conclusion.

I became a victim of the Liberia Civil War. Through the years, it remained difficult to forget that the events had occurred, and move on. I know that forgiveness is not an easy process. It takes time. The peace of heart, the healing of the wounds, the denial, and the betrayal—they may come to me in the future, and I know they will. However, I also know that I do not know when. When an armed rebel killed one of my relatives during the Liberia Civil War in 1992, the incident completely baffled me. I was shocked. It affected me so much that I came to hate the perpetrator. My hatred at that time showed up. I became bitter and angry deep inside. In my heart, I despised the people who carried firearms and other weapons at that time. The difficult part was to face the perpetrator in person. I became mindful of what I said to him because he was armed. When I left Liberia and took refuge in the Ivory Coast, I was surprised to find the perpetrator himself in the refugee center. Finally, when I met him, I asked him: “Why did you kill my relative?”

The perpetrator was speechless, trying to mumble an incomprehensible reason. Eventually, he merely said, "It was the war and I need your forgiveness." I cried and said, "I will talk to you another time." After two years, I was able to forgive him, but didn't forget the incident. It takes much time and strength to bear the pain of loss, especially the loss of life of beloved ones. The negative state of life, resulting from that unfavorable episode, affected my physical wellbeing. When a person holds on to anger, the holding on distracts her from performing her daily functions, which can eventually lead to troubled relationships as well as persistent stress. In order to clear the mind, it is essential to forego resentment, forgive the hurt, and divert the brain to more productive concerns to let the process of healing begins. In my case, I found it difficult to get out of my shell and easily forgive the person responsible for the death of my relative.

I came to realize later on that anger and frustration, building inside me, was ruining my life, health, and relationships. In fact, I was only hurting myself by not forgiving people. Thereafter, at one point, I had to do something about it. I decided to let go of the past. Even if the memories of my dying relative remained in me, I accepted the fact that he was no longer among us, among the living. Thus, with all those memories I cherished of him, I decided to move on with my life.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LIBERIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Introduction

This chapter opens with a brief exploration of the historical backdrop of the Liberian refugee crisis. It also presents a definition of the term “refugee” and a brief look at the Liberian civil war and its impacts on its citizens, the Liberian-American connection, the near-privileged conditions in the Buduburam Refugee Camp, and the process of refugee resettlement in the United States.

The American Colonization Society, an organization interested in founding a homeland for emancipated American slaves, became interested in Liberia in 1816. In 1822, the first freed slaves landed in Liberia from the United States. In 1847, Liberia declared independence. A democratic government and elected officials were established. The capital city Monrovia is named after the fifth US President James Monroe. In 1980, Sergeant Samuel K. Doe carried out a military coup and took power after killing President Tolbert and his cabinet.

The Liberian civil war started on December 24, 1989. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia from the Ivory Coast. Scholars have offered explanations for the war, that it was motivated by a corrupt political regime, predatory leaders that abused power as well as economic disparities. The 1990 civil war brought an end to President Samuel Kenyon Doe’s era that came into power a decade before. Studies done on the Liberian civil war reveal that greed and power were the primary causes of conflict.

Impunity and Passivity

Civil war oppresses a nation in many ways, such as corruption, oppression, poor governance, and tribal aggression. The continent of Africa has suffered greatly from war; for example countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. Eventually, a devastating civil war had to take place to decide on who gets to run the nation: the oppressive forces or the forces of democratic principles.

Definitions

Fleur Houston defined a *refugee* as “a person who has been forced to leave his or her home on a temporary or permanent basis, chiefly because of war or persecution, persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”¹ Echoing Amnesty International (AI) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) definitions, Jörg Finsterwalder also defined the term as “an individual who has absconded their country because of persecution, war, violence, fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.”² Moberg even noted an attempt to expand the *refugee* definition to include “environmentally displaced persons.”³

¹ Fleur S. Houston, *You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees, and Asylum* (New York: Routledge Press, 2015), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 177.

³ Kara K. Moberg, “Extending Refugee Definitions to Cover Environmentally Displaced Persons Displaces Necessary Protection,” *Iowa Law Review* 94, no. 1 (2009): 1107.

The Liberian Civil War

Liberia is located on the West coast of Africa, bordered on the east by Cote d'Ivoire, on the west by Sierra Leone, on the north by Guinea, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean. In 1817, as a component of the emancipation program for African Americans in the United States, the American Colonization Society (ACS) sent an expedition for a new colony in Africa for the free African Americans and established in Liberia in 1822. In 1847, Liberia became an independent nation as the new Republic of Liberia. By 1867, ACS had sent at least 13,000 free African Americans to the republic. The country was a colony established by the United States for enslaved black Americans who were liberated from slavery in the United States in the mid-1800's. Liberia today is home to about 4 million people.⁴ The emancipated slaves (Americo-Liberian) took power and oppressed the local inhabitants for a very long time. Thus, a coup occurred in 1980, placing into power Samuel Doe, a sergeant in the Liberian army, as the new president.⁵ The late President Doe had the support of the oppressed indigenous Liberians. Following his nine years of reign, political, economic, and societal upheaval occurred, which led to the eruption of the Liberian Civil War that lasted fourteen years (1989-2003).

The civil war commenced when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched a massive armed offensive against the government of President Samuel Doe on December 24, 1989. It raged until 2003 and only settled down in 2005. Due to the porosity of the geopolitical borders, the conflict spilled into the neighboring countries of Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and

⁴ Bureau of African Affairs, "U.S. Relations with Liberia: A BAA Fact Sheet," *U.S. Department of State*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/6618> (June 20, 2018).

⁵ Ibid.

Guinea.⁶ As tactical and financial urgency required, the rebels slipped through the borders where they could find economic resources, after which they went back to Liberia to continue waging their war.

The former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor's professed objectives were ending corruption and dictatorship from the then President Doe. However, upon Doe's death in September 1990, the Liberian war did not cease. In the end, the aims of the Liberian rebellion were forgotten since Taylor and other warlords began fighting for the leadership of the country which brought about the suffering of the civilians. The war changed from being a war of revolution and turned to be genocide. Civilians suffered greatly and lost their lives at a high rate compared to the military members engaged in the war. There is no doubt the war was fueled by ethnic animosity and individual lust for power.

The Liberian American Connection

Liberia, however, had a special connection with the United States as its historical and political progenitor. As was earlier noted, the freed black American slaves, who left the United States back in the nineteenth century, became the founding fathers of the nation of Liberia. This historical connection had established a multi-level tie between the United States and Liberia, and between Americans and Liberians. This unique historical and contemporary knowledge of America may have generated high expectations.

⁶ Jeff Drumtra, "West Africa's Refugee Crisis Spills across Many Borders," Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/west-africas-refugee-crisis-spills-across-many-borders> (accessed June 20, 2018).

Impacts of the Civil War

At the height of the civil war, thousands of Liberians were forcibly displaced from their homes into the neighboring countries leaving to protect their lives. Between August 2002 and August 2003, for example, many West Africans had to flee Liberia and the Ivory Coast.⁷ Thousands of Liberians died in the war as well, mostly as collateral damage caught in the crossfire of rebel (National Patriotic Force of Liberia) combatants and the government forces of Liberia. In the region, about 250,000 people lost their lives including women and children. Many people were uprooted from their homes and forced to flee. Considering that the four affected countries were in the bottom 20 of the 196 countries around the world in per capita wealth, the civil war did not help, but instead pushed these countries into a more abject economic situation.

Within Liberia alone, about 700,000 people had lost their homes in the years between 1989 and 2003. Approximately half a million stayed in the country, while the rest left the country to seek shelter elsewhere.⁸ Given that about 4 million people were living in the entire country, the figure means that approximately one in five Liberians lost their homes to the conflict. Linda Moore, for instance, was a victim of the civil war violence. Three soldiers beat her. Having escaped the warring forces, she slept in bushes with other displaced people who, like her, fled their homes. Adding to the shock, she saw dead bodies on the street of Monrovia, especially that of children and women.⁹ Today, she resides in St. Paul, Minnesota with her family.

Those people who remained in Liberia mostly lived in makeshift settlements and a few official camps that had been designated for displaced people. The awful conditions in the

⁷ Bureau of African Affairs, "U.S. Relations with Liberia."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Linda Moore, e-mail message, October 15, 2018.

countries of refuge resulted in water shortages and a wide variety of potentially fatal diseases. These conditions already prompted many to seek a better life outside Liberia instead.

The Root Causes of the Refugee Problem

War is the immediate cause of mass displacements around the world, particularly in some African countries. However, although conflict and war constitute the immediate cause, an underlying cause must be well understood and addressed. Stephan Bauman noted that the broader cause of this problem is power, greed, persistent oppression, entrenched poverty, and corruption.¹⁰

In this complex world, the global refugee problem can be developed and exacerbated by a layer of factors. Bauman believed that the root causes of this violence and human displacements are more stable factors than many may have expected. These are human values, beliefs, and worldview, which drive human behavior.¹¹ Oppression can cause political and social tensions that can result in conflicts and wars. These values, particularly in the politically powerful groups in society, ignore, exploit, and oppress the minorities, the women, and the children, plainly on the basis of race, gender, age, and even faith.

Meanwhile, worldviews frame the human conception of reality, pushing them to justify the validity of an oppressive war, the massacre of innocent civilians, and the modern diaspora that brought massive refugees through the boundaries of more affluent countries in Europe and North America. Most of these worldviews are handed down undiluted from generations to

¹⁰ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Isam Smeir, *Seeking Refugee: Root Causes in Seeking Refuge on the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 153-154.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

generations as cultures and traditions, defining a way of life. Thus, unjust worldviews spread injustice throughout the world, causing poverty, mass displacements, and deaths.

For Christians, the way to stop the problem of forced migration is to change these unjust and violent worldviews, transforming them into just, peaceful, and gentle worldviews that value and respect human lives. Bauman proposed that this transformation can occur through right relationships between peoples.¹² He and his fellow authors argued that the causes of mass displacements are mere symptoms of a broken relationship between human beings. If relationships work, injustice and violence are unnecessary options.

The Buduburam Refugee Camp

In their attempt to escape slaughtering, sacrifices, dismemberment, mutilation, rape and carvings, many Liberians fled their homeland, seeking peace and security. However, at some borders, refugees were interrogated and, at times, even exploited and incarcerated. Moreover, upon arriving in other countries, they had to contend with other sources of fear: limited supplies, overcrowded camps, and communications problems. Camps were established in a variety of countries where refugees sought new homes. One well-known camp was the Buduburam Refugee Camp (BRC) in Ghana, West Africa. In many ways, the Buduburam Refugee Camp was unlike many of the refugee camps throughout Africa where Liberians sought new homes.

The BRC, at one time, had housed about 38,000 refugees, mostly from Liberia. It features pleasant homes, supermarkets with plenty of food, hair salons, soccer field, and places of worship. Thus, it gave the feel of a small town, instead of a dreary camp for refugees. There are schools that also educate children from the surrounding community in Ghana, and the

¹² Ibid., 161.

community publishes a newspaper every two weeks.¹³ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deserves a great deal of credit for creating an atmosphere that was conducive to stable family life. However, many of the Liberian refugees wanted a permanent home that they could call their own, instead of spending years living in what is really a camp, no matter how attractive the ambiance of that camp might be.

Consequently, despite the desirable facilities, many Liberian residents were ready to leave the BRC after the civil war came to an end. Some want to return to Liberia, while others wanted to move to permanent lives in another country. It can be challenging to understand the gravity of the situation that faced Liberian citizens. Some children went for over five years without receiving any schooling. Nevertheless, some of the Liberians were hesitant to go back home, even after knowing the simple fact that a refugee camp is, at best, not a permanent place to live in. Similarly, some Liberian war refugees have ended up heading to the United States, taking advantage of a program that the UNHCR administered for refugees.

Flights to the United States

Approximately 7,000 reached the United States in May 2004.¹⁴ However, initially, Liberians had to attract first the attention of the United States Embassy in Liberia. To do so, they stacked up the bodies of civilians in front of the embassy to draw attention to the situation. These civilians died from rebel mortar attacks at the height of the siege of the Liberian capital of Monrovia in 1990.

¹³ Francis Kpatinde, "A Tale of Two Camps: Bustling Buduburam and Quiet Krisan," UNHCR, accessed October 20, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2006/7/44c7783e4/tale-camps-bustling-buduburam-quiet-krisan.html>.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration," accessed June 21, 2018, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/prm/rls/32410.htm>.

Eventually, officials at the embassy understood the message and activated the U.S. immigration process. The refugees who came to the United States went through a process of interviewing with American immigration officials to determine whether they were actual refugees.¹⁵ In fact, gaining refugee status from the American government is a rigorous process. A refugee had to indicate that they personally suffered from violence, or some other sort of harm, in order to receive refugee status and be granted admission to the United States. The documentation process begins with a screening procedure that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had established. This procedure includes an iris scan, multiple interviews, and the submission of considerable background information.

Moreover, a refugee has to go through several American security checks, which include screenings with federal agencies tasked in national security functions, such as Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the State Department (SD), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCC).¹⁶ In these agencies, the refugee has to submit fingerprints that are run against biometric databases. He or she also submits to medical tests to make sure they are not carrying communicable diseases. Some cultural orientation instructions are also required. These are all solid procedures that take time to complete. Nevertheless, their compliance ensures that, when someone gains refugee status, he or she has jumped a significant number of hurdles.

Liberian war refugees, who found new homes in Minnesota sought better opportunities, such as education, job, good health, and better living environment. As their number increased,

¹⁵ Loucoumane Coulibaly, “Thousands of Liberian Refugees to Resettle in U.S.,” *Washington Post*, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A64811-2004Feb23.html>.

¹⁶ International Institute of Minnesota, “Refugee Resettlement,” accessed August 20, 2018, www.iimn.org.

they have started putting together community spaces where they can talk in their native language, worship together, and take part in their other cultural activities. Consequently, the Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM) was later established in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

Impunity, Oppression, and Forgiveness

Even among those who found their new home in the United States, the impunity and oppression that the Liberian war refugees suffered at the hands of their political leaders and compatriots marked their souls for life. This mark came from the wounds that they had to carry with them, perhaps for life, no matter the distance they have traveled to flee their Liberian homeland. To carry this burden without inadvertently tainting their new lives, the Liberian refugees needed to learn to forgive the sins committed against them.

Forgiveness initiates the healing process of the soul. It is a process, through which a person lets go of any hard feelings, pain or hurt, which has visited his or her life, sometimes, as in the case with the Liberian refugees, as a consequence of what others did to them. However, moving forward is difficult as there are certain feelings of resentment and hatred for the persons who caused them. At the same time, unresolved pain makes a person unhappy and angry, which has a considerable impact on his or her psychological, emotional health. Hence, forgiveness makes a person spiritually as well as emotionally stronger, which is an important element of a healthy life.¹⁷

¹⁷ Sandage and Schuls, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, 190.

The Forgiveness of Jesus

The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings forgiveness, reconciliation and healing even when there are sins, conflict and suffering. According to Psalm 32:1, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.”¹⁸ Jesus holds forgiveness as an act of kindness, as it pardons the offender and forgoes any exploitive situation that may disrupt a life. In Matthew 5:43-44, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you.”¹⁹ In other words, Jesus intended Christians to make peace with their enemies; that it is better to forgive them and bless them than otherwise, even if they have caused unimaginable harm. The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings forgiveness, and those who professed themselves as Christians should do the same for their peace of heart.

The Bible instructs us to forgive. Colossians 3:13 states, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”²⁰ Forgiveness should be out of obedience to God. It must be remembered that each human being is a sinner. Thus, God forgives us; then, we should forgive each other. Similarly, Mark 11:25 states, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”²¹

Forgiveness matters in everyone’s life as it makes a person courageous to accept the facts, reconcile, regain trust, and rebuild relationships. The first step at forgiveness is to stop blaming the person because, the Bible teaches, everyone makes mistakes and, by forgiving, one

¹⁸ Psalm 32:1.

¹⁹ Matthew 5:43-44.

²⁰ Colossians 3:13.

²¹ Mark 11:25.

frees himself or herself from discontent and revenge. Although, at times, forgiveness does not lead to reconciliation, but it does protect a person from further damage or from inflicting more damage. It is important for the person to show remorse for his or her actions. However, if a person refuses to acknowledge his offenses, then, forgiveness and letting go become more challenging. Moreover, resentment and bitterness lead to more complex problems.

Further, the longer a person holds on to anger and feelings of resentment, the longer it causes dissatisfaction and greater time needed to recover from its adverse effects. A deep injury requires much time and patience, but at the end of the day, healing begins when a person forgives. Forgiveness can help to release the person from the bondage. It reduces suffering, and a person becomes spiritually stronger and closer to God.²²

The Bible places forgiving people at a high place in the community. Psalms 103:2-3 states, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.”²³ Forgiving is not easy. It is a slow process, the person should be willing to heal from suffering by deciding to let go of the unfavorable condition. She must work towards compassion, the understanding of others, and reconciliation. The emotional pain tends to subside when the mind is diverted to more constructive thoughts.

In Christian communities, leadership, forgiveness, and justice are connected. In leading, a person faces diverse problems. In demanding for justice, someone who committed a wrong must pay the price for her damaging actions. However, leaders need to make a quick decision towards forgiveness to patch or even mend the damages created and get back to ordinary business. To

²² Ibid., 8.

²³ Psalms 103:2-3.

make effective decisions that focus on building communities, it is still important to punish those who completely disrupt the lives of others, while granting forgiveness to those who are willing to make amendments and mend their ways.²⁴

Any person can suffer from betrayals from members of their community, their friends, or even their family. However, each of these betrayals requires an act of forgiveness, as nobody, except for Christ, is ever perfect. If Christ had forgiven those who hanged him on the cross, Christians must follow his example. Worse, building up resentments can eventually lead to further conflicts. Ephesians 4:29-32 states,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.²⁵

Unforgiveness and bitterness in the heart lead to suffering. These negative feelings had led people to live a stressful life. In the end, the lack of forgiveness leads to arrogance, conceit, and self-destructive stress that, in turn, sometimes leads to further rebelliousness and wrongdoings. Unforgiveness increases misunderstandings and disrupts society. Forgiveness can lead to sustaining healthy relationships.

Conclusion

The chapter has presented the central role of political impunity in the initiation of civil wars in the lives of the Liberian citizens, eventually forcing them to be refugees in the United

²⁴ Ibid., 11.

²⁵ Ephesians 4:29-32.

States. It also explored the determination of the refugees to escape their miserable condition in their homeland and their temporary asylum, such as the Buduburam Refugee Camp, and seek refuge in the United States. However, it has also presented forgiveness as another way to reduce the agonizing pain of Liberian refugees. Forgiveness plays a major role when it comes to the healing process.

CHAPTER TWO

MINISTERING TO THE REFUGEES: A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

This chapter explores the biblical foundation for ministering to refugees in the tradition of the Judeo-Christians from the time of the Old Testament to the New Testament. It begins with the biblical conception of the “neighbor.” It presented an argument that the Liberian refugees are as neighbors to Christian Americans and that welcoming of refugees and immigrants is largely a component of the biblical history, as in the story of Ruth in the Old Testament. It closed with the dispersion of the Christian disciples to the fringes of the Roman Empire to escape slaughter and to spread the Gospel.

A refugee is an individual that is forced to flee their country of origin to another country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Although refugees are human beings and regarded as neighbors. People are encouraged to assist refugees in any way possible. The book of Ruth also covers the narrative of a widow from the tribe of Moab who chooses to accompany her mother in-law Naomi to Israel to stay with her. This story shows how Boaz accepts the widow without questions and this can be utilized in the understanding of how people are supposed to relate to refugees.

Refugees as Neighbors

When refugees migrate from their homeland, their religious faith usually continues to influence the way they live. Their religious beliefs continue to guide various facets of their

everyday life. For Christians, reading the Bible everyday could transform their lives in many significant ways, whether they are refugees or American brethren. Liberian refugees may find their faith challenged especially living in a new country.

This section emphasizes the Old Testament story of Ruth to better understand the hand of God in caring for refugees even from the gentile country of Moab.¹ The Scripture, also contained other stories of forced immigration, from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden² to the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt in their journey home to the Promised Land.³ In the New Testament, the flight of the Holy Family, of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary,⁴ to Egypt signaled the Christian diaspora, which later occurred as the local religious authorities unleashed severe persecution against the ancient Church through the gestion of a young zealot by the name of Saul.⁵

According to Stephen Bauman, “We ought to love refugees because they are our neighbors, but also because the Bible teaches us to value them, like us, they are made in the image of God.”⁶ Refugees and immigrants are human beings and are wonderfully made in the image of God. Refugees are people who left awful situations behind and are simply undone by the idea of having to go back to that horror or having to find another country to take them in.

¹ 1 Kings 11:7.

² Genesis 3:23-24.

³ Exodus 13:17-22.

⁴ Matthew 2:1-11.

⁵ Acts 8:1, 3-4.

⁶ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 36.

Refugee Stories in the Old Testament

The biblical book of Ruth challenges the assumptions and stereotypes about immigrants seeking refuge and a safe place to call home. It contains a moral perspective on the resilience of women when the combined efforts to work in solidarity while pursuing their liberty and freedom from a Godly approach. In a patriarchal society, women were deemed as less credible individuals due to the male dominance in the community.⁷ The book of Ruth explains how Ruth fled a place of war and destruction in order to save her life and create a better future. At the time when Israelites fought off all their enemies ranging from the Moabites to the Ammonites, they had a unique way of identifying one another to avoid infiltration from foreigners.⁸ Moreover, they lacked a consolidated form of governance since they had no king; hence, everyone did as they pleased. However, they embraced foreigners who wanted to become part of the Israelite community. Therefore, as the world consistently engages in warfare despite peace negotiations and talks, the need to welcome refugees within national borders to provide accommodation is essential as was the case with Ruth in the Old Testament.

Ruth as a Refugee

The story of Ruth begins with Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, who flee Bethlehem due to the harsh famine in the land. They opted to venture into new territory in search for better living conditions for their two sons.⁹ They settle in Moab, a foreign land for Naomi's entire

⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars, Ruth* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2010), 320.

⁸ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 40.

⁹ Andre Lacocque and K. C. Hanson, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 10.

household, soon after her husband died leaving her with only her two sons, who had married Moabite women (slowly losing their identity and heritage). Naomi is forced to remain in Moab since her two sons are her source of economic sustenance and the providers of the entire family.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the sons died shortly afterward leaving behind three women to provide for themselves in a male-dominated society. It is important to note that the book of Ruth uses symbolism through the naming of children which was an Israelite custom. For instance, Naomi's sons were named Mahlon and Kilion which translated to "illness" and "languished." Hence, their names signified their living conditions in Moab.

Soon after, Naomi heard that God had stopped the famine in Judah and the land had already provided the people food. So she decided to leave Moab and return to Judah, while setting her two daughters-in-law free from her household. Ruth 1:14-18,

¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah returned to her mother's house. But Ruth refused to leave Naomi. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do, thus, and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" ¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.¹¹

When Naomi recognized the determination of Ruth to stay with her, she let her be. So Naomi and Ruth journeyed together back to the land of Judah and to her house in Bethlehem. Evidently, Ruth was a kind, generous, and responsible woman. She did not want to abandon her mother-in-law because Naomi was quite old to be alone in the journey and in her house in

¹⁰ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary A Complete Bible Commentary in One Volume!* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 288.

¹¹ Ruth 1:14-18.

Bethlehem. In this way, she displayed her loyalty, and fulfilled her daughterly obligation, to the old woman who was the mother of her beloved husband. Thus, Ruth freely chose to live the life of a refugee and live the rest of her life away from her own mother.

Often, people had to leave their native lands for different reasons. They can be political problems (e.g., wars), economic hardships (e.g., poverty, famine, and drought), and even natural disasters. In the Book of Ruth, we can see a widowed woman who voluntarily left her place of birth for her loyalty to the widowed mother of her husband. Her choice was a decision of love, borne from a commitment of one's life to a family that had become her own through marriage. Ruth was not afraid of potential difficulties that she may encounter in the new place. Refugees, like the Liberian refugees, also face the same unknown prospects in a strange land. Moreover, the Liberian refugees knew the sufferings they have to go through in applying for refugee status in the United States with all those repeated interviews and screening procedures that could span into days, weeks, months, or even years.

In the same manner that Ruth refused to leave Naomi to take the journey alone and in sorrow, some member of the Liberian families, seeking asylum in the United States, also refused to leave their family members behind in refugee camps, Ruth and the Liberian refugees could not leave their family, in blood or in marriage, alone. They want to go wherever their beloved ones go.

The story of Ruth, however, saw a beautiful ending in the arms of the people who love Naomi and, by extension, also showed love to her.

When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"²⁰ She said to them, "Call me no longer Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me."²¹ I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"²² So Naomi returned together with

Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.¹²

Like Naomi or Mara, the bitterness of loss continues to haunt refugees wherever they go, whoever they are with, and however the local communities welcome them with joy. Like Mara, the Liberian refugees carry with them their broken souls, which had been broken by the cruelty of violent humans and, in some way, forced them to ask why they have to suffer? Christians are under the burden of their faith to be the human face of God in ministering to their broken souls and let God's love heal them and make them whole again.

Still, despite their brokenness, Liberian refugees continue their struggles to live, in the same manner as Ruth, who, knowing that Naomi was too old to work in the field, volunteered herself to take the task of working in the field for food. So Ruth asked Naomi to allow her to go to the fields and help gather some grains. And, Naomi let her be so as she wished.

Then later events in the story of Ruth had indicated that the Lord sends good people to care and love for those He loves, including the refugees and immigrants. It turned out that Naomi had a kinsman through marriage on the side of her dead husband who was rich and owned a large barley field in Bethlehem. His name was Boaz¹³ It was in this field that Ruth came to work for Naomi's and her food. Although Boaz only occasionally visited the field to see the reapers, the day that Ruth first worked in the field, Boaz was there, visiting his reapers. So he asked the person in charge of the reapers about the new girl working in the field. Thus, the reaper in-charge told Boaz that Ruth was a Moabite and came to Bethlehem with Naomi.¹⁴

¹² Ruth 1:19-22.

¹³ Ruth 2:1.

¹⁴ Ruth 2:4-7.

Learning of the presence of the field's owner, Ruth came to the presence of Boaz, prostrating before him since the morning and seeking that she may be allowed to help gather the barley field after the reapers. It easy to guess that it was difficult for Ruth to go to the field of a wealthy man and asked his servants to allow her to take the leftovers. When Ruth lived in her mother's house and then got married, she had much and possibly went to work in her own field. In a foreign country, her position was a bit better than the servant. Despite this, she did her best to find food anyway and work hard without regrets that she left her native land.¹⁵

Boaz was stunned when he saw Ruth at his feet at night when he woke up. Ruth said the phrase "spread your cloak" that meant the proposition to get married. He was very happy and proud because Ruth came to him and did not choose a younger man. He promised Ruth to marry her. Before the marriage, Boaz had to clarify some issues concerning the law because there was another candidate of greater traditional right to marry her. Ruth returned home and told everything to Naomi.¹⁶ Naomi told her that they should wait until Boaz had settled everything within the day, according to their custom.

¹³So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him."
¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ruth 2:8-16.

¹⁶ Ruth 3:8-18.

¹⁷ Ruth 4:13-17.

Evidently, God had blessed the marriage between the Moabite widow Ruth and the good, Israelite, Boaz. Their descendants became the blood from which the great Jewish king, David, descended. It was also from the descendants of Ruth and Boaz, through King David, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, came to be born.¹⁸

Moab migrated in search of a better life despite their past traumatic life experiences of losing husbands. Their journey is full of uncertainties as Ruth knows she will be a stranger in the new land. She seeks refuge but she makes a decisive choice to go with her mother-in-law to Israel. Ruth meets Boaz; an Israelite man who shows compassion, love, and kindness to both women and later forms an intimate relationship with Ruth. They get a son who gives both women hope and the possibility of a brighter future in Israel. Eventually, the birth of the son serves as the lineage of Ruth as an ancestor to Jesus Christ, the savior of humankind. Therefore, it becomes evidently clear that refugees come from strange lands that practice different cultures and religious belief systems but they have the power to spark change and initiate revolutions that change peoples' future. Refugees do take a step of faith to venture into new territories without any idea of the outcome as was the case with Ruth.

Relevance to the Liberian Refugee

The persistent conflict and government crisis in Liberia has resulted in the deaths of many people due to political greed and economic sabotage. The situation in the refugee centers was deplorable due to over-crowding, lack of enough resources such as sanitation products, clothes, and manpower to provide guidance and counseling services to millions of women and children exposed to the detrimental effects of civil war and genocide. The most vulnerable

¹⁸ Matthew 1:1-17.

groups in the refugee centers were women and small children who could not defend themselves from any physical assault or aggression. However, despite the refugee crisis in Liberia, some of the refugees have been able to form social groups that rehabilitate traumatized people from war-torn countries in West Africa.

Refugees from Christian-based nations have established churches and seminars to create a sense of hope and togetherness among strangers in refugee camps as a way to preach God's purpose and mission for the people. It is a sign of giving the refugees strength needed to continue living their lives even though they lost almost everything during the civil wars in their respective countries. Similar to the life story of Ruth as a migrant in Israel, she was able to embrace the new culture and people eventually creating a life for herself, Naomi and Boaz.¹⁹ The same applies to the refugees who have experienced the same ordeal or worse; they stand a chance to improve their lives by actively making life-changing decisions that will create a pathway for their children. Furthermore, most refugees share differing religious beliefs and practices.

In conclusion, the book of Ruth elaborates on the impact of migration to foreign lands after devastating outcomes of life and the need to quickly adapt to change whenever the need arises. The life of immigration and living as a refugee in new lands is a concept that has been explained throughout the book of Ruth to showcase the plight of vulnerable groups experience in a patriarchy society. Hence, the need to protect women and children as refugees is important since they are part of modern day society and play a key role in creating peace, hope, and a future.

¹⁹ Ibid., 40.

Other Refugees in the Old Testament

Other stories of voluntary and forced migration can be found in the Old Testament. In fact, the list of Biblical migration or refugees is quite long. Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sara, Jacob, Moses, the people of Israel, David, Elijah, and many others. The reasons of their escape were mainly political or the Lord's will but nobody gave up the native land in order to take care of a person, as Ruth did. In fact, God encouraged Abram to leave his father to go to the place promised to him.²⁰

Forced migrations in the Old Testament, however, were often direct and indirect consequences of human evil committed against their brethren. Jacob's sons sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt.²¹ The Israelites, under Moses, had to flee Egypt after years of oppression under King Pharaoh.²² Thus, the role of human evil in the contemporary refugee crisis is not surprising and, in fact, even predictable.

The Refugee Situation in the Old Testament

What does the Bible say about how to deal with refugees? The Mosaic Law, which appears largely in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, covers rules for just about areas in life for God's people, has a lot to say about this. For example, Leviticus 19:33-34 states, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens

²⁰ Genesis 12:1.

²¹ Genesis 37:11- 28.

²² Exodus 3:9-10, 13:17-22.

in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”²³ The key to this verse is the empathy that the Israelite should feel for the refugee (i.e., the “alien”) who has to come into their land and find shelter. This rule reflected the joy of the Bethlehem women when Naomi and Ruth arrived from Moab. One of the most fascinating narratives in the early Old Testament is the time that the Hebrews lived in Egypt, under the rule of the pharaohs, as a result of famine in Israel. The fact that the entire Jacob family had to live in the region of Goshen was to serve as a lesson that their descendants should be kind to others. The gesture of Boaz in accepting Ruth as wife, despite her being a Moabite, illustrates this kind of acceptance that is expected from the people of God.

The generosity of some people in the Old Testament was not a mistake. It reflected the generous plan of God. For the refugee, that might, at times, sound like a promise, particularly when they show up in a new land and find generosity. The obligation of the privileged citizens in a country towards the refugees, however, appeared to be far stronger than those who are less materially privileged. For those born in an advantageous situation, the obligation to help those who are less fortunate is clear.

The culture and customs in the Old Testament dictated that the foreigner be included in the provisions of the Jewish lands. As God told the Israelites in Leviticus 19:9-10, “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.”²⁴

²³ Leviticus 19:33-34.

²⁴ Leviticus 19:9-10.

So the idea of setting aside extra materials for those in need is just another means of helping the refugees in our midst. One way to fight the rhetoric of those who would speak against the character of refugees is to remind others of the fact that God loves everyone, the refugees included. God told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 10:17-19,

For the Lord your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.²⁵

This divine message took the Israelites back to that concept of empathy. The current refugee crisis indicated that it is hard sometimes for some Americans to extend that empathy to refugees around them.

However, these verses from Deuteronomy reminded the Israelites, and the church of today as well, that keeping blessings away from refugees should be strongly reconsidered because it could be part of a Christian duty to welcome strangers including refugees. It is a good thing to help them find their footing among Americans so that they may reestablish a new life for themselves. Free from condescension, Christians have the obligation to welcome them, not just as fellow human beings, but as brethren from faraway lands. Christians are encouraged to work together to help build better lives for refugee families.

During the political existence of the Kingdom of Israel, the importance of helping refugees was never far from the mind of God and from the minds of the Israelites. This is reflected in a prayer from this period:

²⁵ Deuteronomy 10:17-19.

Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the people of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.²⁶

When Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, these verses were used as part of the prayer of dedication. The fact that this evocation of the refugee appeared in the dedication showed the priority that kind treatment for strangers played in the ancient Hebrew religion. It also indicated the correct priority that this sort of attention and attitude should prevail among Christian believers of today. Moreover, the idea that we should “do according to all that the foreigner calls”²⁷ suggested that American Christians should make every effort to help refugees, like those from Liberia, find and receive what they need to survive and thrive in America.

The Old Testament often reminds us that God has expectations for His people to follow His commands. It is important to show empathy and care to fellow human beings who are, in fact, brethren in one loving Lord and God. To minister to the Liberian refugees, the Christian must help the refugees get access to basic services, transportation, and other amenities as a mere urgent and initial acts of solidarity with them. If Christians can help their friends in a similar situation, helping Liberian refugees must be of no difference.

Refugee Stories in the New Testament

A refugee status occurs when one flees his or her home country due to social evils such as persecution, violence or war. Today, the world is privy to the refugee problem due to the

²⁶ 1 Kings 8: 41-43.

²⁷ 1 Kings 8:41-43.

heightened tensions among communities and countries.²⁸ For example, the Syrian and the Yemen refugee issue is among the worst humanitarian crisis ever experienced in the latest time. Just like it is happening today, the term refugee or asylum-seeking is not exempt to the religious society. Notably, human intolerance leads to the displacement of a population, who moves to another country for safety.²⁹ Indeed, the Liberian community in Minnesota is a well-documented exodus of many Liberian nationals due to the war that was experienced in their country. Meanwhile, the focus of this section is about the refugee status in the New Testament, while drawing direct correlation into the Liberian mass exodus into the state of Minnesota.

It is apparent that the Liberian refugees in Minnesota draws a clear-cut and parallel connection to the plight of the Holy Family in the Bible, Joseph, Mary and Jesus, who were refugees. They did everything they could to prevent harm from the authority that did not embrace them. Therefore, they fled their home countries and went to another land for the sake of their personal safety from the blood-thirsty authority.³⁰

The first instance that we possibly see the Holy Family as refugees occurs in the second chapter of Matthew, where immediately after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. At this point, we begin to see how unsettled the Holy Family is, especially after a resounding warning is delivered to Joseph by the Lord's angel that Bethlehem would not be safe for the baby born Christ.³¹ The

²⁸ Joyce Jeffris, *Who Are Refugee, What's the Issue* (New York: Kidhaven Publishing, 2018), 8.

²⁹ Martin O'Kane, *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 18.

³⁰ Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 31.

³¹ Mathew 2:12-15.

interaction between Joseph and the angel of the Lord is a clear warning for this family to escape their homeland and go to another city where the authority could not harm them.

This situation of conflict is quite relevant to most cases in the world today. Indeed, the Liberian refugees left their home country due to the extensive civil war. Consequently, Mary Joseph and baby Jesus left for Egypt as was directed by the angel.³² Immediately after their departure, King Herod ordered the slaughtering of all the male children, aged below two years. This ax was meant to land on Jesus, who by good providence had fled out of Bethlehem as directed by the angel of the Lord in a dream with Joseph. Today, this day is celebrated as the Feast of the Holy Innocents as a reminder of the execution of these innocent children by King Herod.

The refugee status of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus differed to an extent from what we are currently experiencing. Thus, unlike the modern day refugees, as in the case of Liberian Refugees in Minnesota, the Holy Family were never subjected to an official application to the Egyptian authority before they could be granted asylum in the foreign country. Instead, the trio entered a new territory that was not under the control of King Herod. This is perfectly similar to what happens in the current society; whenever one makes it to the border then the laws of the new country begins, and they can stay safe from dangers inherent in their countries of origin. In the book of Kings, Egypt was considered the land of refuge, and it hosted many people who sought for asylum.³³

³² Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England), *A Place of Refuge: A Positive Approach to Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), 8.

³³ Galvin Garrett, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge: The Messiah's Return from Egypt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 177.

At the time when Jesus was born, Herod the Great ruled the country. He heard that the son of God was born and that news was a threat to his authority. King Herod wanted to find the baby with the notion of killing the baby. He asked the wise men who were there to visit the baby to report to him where He was. The wise men promised Herod to him where the Baby can be located. However, perhaps realizing the danger such revelation can bring to the Baby, they left Bethlehem through another way, back to where they came from.³⁴

After the wise men went away, Joseph saw a dream where an angel of God ordered him to get up, take Mary and the Baby and go to Egypt. They had to leave for a foreign country for a political threat, coming from Herod who planned to find and kill the Baby. Joseph did according to the Lord's will and The Family set off for their journey at night. They stayed in Egypt until Herod's death and then returned home.³⁵

The escape to Egypt saved Jesus's life but it unfortunately did not protect the children of His age from the furious political leader. When Herod establish out that the wise men cheated him, he got very angry and ordered to murder "all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men."³⁶ His order was fulfilled and the cry of the Jewish mothers was heard all around the land at that time.³⁷

In conclusion, the chapter has validly justified the statement that indeed the Holy Family was indeed fleeing their country, and thus were refugees. Thus, the decree ordered by King

³⁴ Matthew 2:1-11.

³⁵ Matthew 2:13-15.

³⁶ Matthew 2:16.

³⁷ Matthew 2:17-18.

Herod created a crisis that made it hard for the family to stay in Bethlehem. Therefore, they rose up and marched to Egypt for the safety of the baby Jesus.

The Refugee Situation in the New Testament

After the ascension of Christ to Heaven³⁸ and the descent of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost,³⁹ the ancient Church, then referred to as *The Way*, increased significantly,⁴⁰ enough to merit an active persecution from the Jewish religious authorities. Acts 8:1, 34; 9:1-2 states,

That day a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles fled to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria. . . .³Saul then worked for the total destruction of the Church; he went from house to house arresting both men and women and sending them to prison. ⁴Those who escaped went from place to place preaching the Good News. . . .¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples. He had gone to the high priest ²and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus that would authorize him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women that he could find.⁴¹

The persecution resulted into a Christian diaspora, which spread the disciples throughout the Roman Empire and forced the apostles to travel and preach the Good News throughout the Roman Empire, reaching as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.⁴² Forced by threats to their lives and the destruction of the ancient Church, the disciples became refugees to other cities in the Roman Empire where the arms of the Jewish authorities had no power to reach out.

³⁸ Acts 1:9.

³⁹ Acts 2:1-4.

⁴⁰ Acts 6:1, 7.

⁴¹ Acts 8:1, 3-4; 9:1-2.

⁴² Acts 11:19.

After his conversion to Christianity, Saint Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.”⁴³

In the mind of Christ, Saint Paul implied, humanity is one member of the body of Christ; all redeemed by his blood and death on the cross. The message of salvation was and is open to all human beings and that the human family is meant to work together. Thus, the Liberian refugees are members of the body of Christ as the American Christians themselves. The idea that all peoples “were all made to drink of one Spirit”⁴⁴ suggests that human beings were and are all created to meet a common purpose and to work together, hand in hand and side by side, for the fulfillment of God’s plan. Refugees are God’s creation just as much as you are, and the call to help them find what they need to succeed in their new lives in the Twin Cities is a call for action.

Conclusion

The chapter has presented an argument that the Liberian refugees are part of the body of Christ, supported by diverse stories of forced and voluntary immigrations. Refugees migrated from their respective homelands.

In summary, it is evident that refugees go through a lot of hardships in their countries and also in countries they run to. Refugees have to struggle in gaining acceptance and also

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:13.

understand the cultures in those new places. However, they undergo these sufferings sometimes in order to settle in the new countries. The Bible tells us that we should be welcoming. People should have accepting heart towards refugees to ensure they feel safe and cared for.

CHAPTER THREE

DIFFERENT WAYS OF MINISTERING TO LIBERIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES

Introduction

This chapter explores the engagement of the Christian Church with the world as represented by the refugees of Liberia who resettled among Christians in the United States. It also discusses different ways in ministering to Liberian refugees in the Twin Cities, the major challenges encountered in the refugee ministry, and the opportunity to present the Gospel to the new members of the community.

A World Brought to Christianity

It can be extremely challenging to make a new life in a new city, even for someone who grew up within the same country and has not experienced utter chaos, like the Liberian war refugees have gone through. The experience can be a shocking moment. That is a dismal perspective from the world of refugees after going through a series of difficult crises that had threatened even their own existence.

However, the Church has unique gifts to make it an instant support system for refugees. The Church teaches the importance of serving others, particularly the poor. It fosters a community of support as a way of life. The gift of community in the Church already established the very conditions that are capable of supporting families of refugees from Liberia or anywhere in the world.

Nevertheless, their presence of Liberian refugees is also a gift and a blessing to the Church. It is an opportunity for the Church to look for new ways of ministry that goes beyond the traditional processes of mission wherein the missionaries are the once welcomed by people in the mission. In fact, the Liberian refugee crisis has bridged the distance between the missionary and the mission. Instead of Christian missionaries, leaving their homes to do missionary works outside the United States, the migration of refugees and other immigrants has brought, instead, the world and the mission field to the Church.

The presence of the Liberian refugees before the Church, however and inevitably, offers confounding challenges. Sometimes, it can be intimidating to minister to people who came from a different culture and who speak a different language. Some people feel a lack of confidence when it comes to this type of ministry because they believe they do not know how to talk to someone from a vastly different culture. This concern is definitely valid, although presenting a new challenge that can task both the faith and the imaginations of contemporary Christian Americans.

Moreover, it is also true that there will be some miscommunication from time to time when people from one culture try to reach out and help people from another culture, which would not be the first time in the church history. The early disciples had to face the same challenge when bringing the Good News to the gentiles. Thus, the contemporary Church must be prepared to deal with the same challenge anytime in its modern history. However, the church has access to diverse resources that will help members learn how to communicate effectively with people from other cultures and, conversely, will help the Liberian refugee population assimilate successfully with American society.

The Church among the Refugees

If Christ must be present for the resettled refugees of today, the church should be among these refugees, ministering to their needs. Many of these strangers may not share the Christian legacy of faith. However, they are spiritual siblings, fellow adopted sons and daughters of God the Father, and brothers and sisters of the Lord. In this moment in history, the church is given the task to be her brothers' keeper.¹ Her response to this divine call reflects her commitment to the commandment of Christ to love his neighbors.²

Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir recommended five approaches that Christians today can apply to their neighbors, like the Liberians, who are seeking refuge in the United States: (a) provide a warm welcome; (b) minister by teaching; (c) provide legal services; (d) help them acquire their own home; and (e) accompany the minors.

Adjustment is most challenging to refugees during the several initial months of their arrival in the United States. They have significant needs after years of struggling in their first or second settlement country.³ They are in a new country, new community, and new culture, among new people who are as stranger to them as they are to them.

However, welcoming their brothers and sisters in Christ into their community is an obligation of any Christian community. Thus, with the help of relief organizations, the U.S. government, and volunteers can make the welcoming as warm as it can be. Volunteer teams often assemble a "Welcome kit" that will mostly consist of most thing a new family needs in

¹ Mark 12:31.

² Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir, *The Church's Moment in Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 153.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

their new home, from dishes and pots to linens and towels. If the government or non-governmental organization managed to secure a home before the refugee arrival, Christian volunteers can prepare the place for immediate occupation. If that was not possible, a Christian household may have to host the family for days or weeks. Once their new neighbors have settled somehow, they can organize a simple gathering to introduce them to the rest of the community.⁴

Moreover, of all the skills that the resettled refugees must learn to enable them to make a living, the relatively most important skill to learn is the understanding, speaking, and writing the English language. It is so because language is a strong barrier between peoples. Christian volunteers need to teach their new neighbors at least conversational English to help them carry through everyday transactions.⁵

There are a variety of legal services that newly arriving refugees need to help navigate their lives in a new legal environment. Legal guidance in helping them apply for Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status will take a long way in helping them resettle officially and legally.⁶ Conversely, while gaining a new home may not compensate for the lost home, the stability of the new lives of the refugees depends on a home of their own. The U.S. government and non-government organizations usually provide this property in an interest-free loan, initiating them in acquiring assets that will be useful in establishing their credit history in the country.

⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁶ Ibid., 122.

Different Ways of Ministering to the Liberian Refugees

Bringing the Gospel to the Liberian refugees must include ministering to their social, economic, and even political needs in order to thrive as neighbors and brethren in the vast American soil. Jesus and the apostles had to feed the thousands even with a limited number of bread and fishes. Thus, the contemporary Church must work cooperatively within different communities to generate the form of complementary actions that effectively minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the Liberian refugees. Consequently, the church contributes their time and resources in helping these brethren to acquire the necessary skills to help them settle down as self-sustaining citizens and adopt the new American system.

In God's grace, many churches and church communities responded actively to the contemporary challenge from the Liberian refugee influx. These churches and church communities include the River of Life Lutheran Church (RLLC) in North Minneapolis (Minnesota), the Lutheran Social Refugee Center (LSRS) (also in Minnesota), the International Institute of Minnesota (IIM), and many others.

Bible-Guided Multi-Level Support

According to Joseph Robert, the RLLC in North Minneapolis, Minnesota had helped some Liberian refugees paid for their Nursing Assistant training from 2003 to 2005.⁷ Some churches and organizations teach the children some of the languages used including Spanish and English among others. They take in refugees from all parts of the world without judging their

⁷ Joseph Robert, email message, June 1, 2019.

racial identification. The LSRS of Minnesota has also offered hope and helping hand to refugees including refugees from Liberia to resettle in the Twin Cities.⁸

The churches also use the Bible as the primary guide in their activities. The churches that minister to the refugees and immigrants must not choose the refugees based on any criteria, but must simply take them into their congregations as human beings and brethren. The IIM responded by helping refugees with refugee services, workforce development, and education.

The needs of the Liberian refugees are just too diverse to be adequately addressed using a unilateral strategy. Among other needs, some refugees need a place to leave their children while they are out looking for a job, or after school while the parents are still working; this helps the refugees build a new life for themselves. Thus, the Christian community can put together special child care programs, including after-school child care programs or youngster mentoring programs, to address these needs. Different activities of a recreational, educational, or motivational in nature. A woman in northern Minneapolis decided to help a refugee student with homework after school when her parents were not available to help her due to their busy work schedule. Another story is told about a woman who volunteer to teach a refugee family about the importance of reading a product label.

Homelessness is another situation among refugees, which cannot be addressed through unilateral initiatives. Refugees who have no relatives ahead in the Twin Cities, for instance, will find it difficult to settle in once they arrive in the United States. There may be some reluctance to reach out to strangers and even strangers from their own cultural group who have already arrived here. This problem can be addressed through the involvement of different institutions. For

⁸ Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, "Refugee Service," <http://www.lssmn.org/refugeeservices> (accessed October 28, 2018).

instance, homeless refugees may be referred to local homeless shelters or to transitional housing institutions.

Health care, such as medical and dental care, is another area that requires multi-level support from Christian American citizens. These needs can be very serious and urgent, requiring a coordination with the resources in place to provide care. This can be difficult sometimes due to the barriers that language can place in front of those new to the country. However, churches can use their space to host professionals to come in and provide free medical and dental screenings for area refugees, and they can also provide information to refugees about services that are available in the area. These sorts of service will help to build trust between the newly arrived refugees and the community around them.

Even other more direct refugee services, such as providing job readiness assistance (e.g. helping to put together a resume or showing people how to fill out a job application to understanding how to dress and act during a job interview), which help refugees take that first new step in the United States toward personal autonomy, but can require a coordinative effort from the church administrators to its members and other specialized professional services providers.

Thus, a multi-level approach to the ministerial challenges of caring for the Liberian refugees must be adopted to ensure a broader reach and a diverse variety of capabilities to develop organizationally. Finding out how to serve refugee populations is something that anyone with the right mind for service-oriented initiatives can initiate individually, undertake collaboratively, and achieve the biblical mandate successfully.

The Ministry of the Listening Ear

One way to minister to a refugee community, such as the Liberian war refugees in the Twin Cities, is to learn their stories. Stories allow better knowledge and understanding of unfamiliar contexts to flourish. Understanding the situation, from which these refugees want to escape, allows those who want to minister to them to have a look at the different needs, motivations, and hopes that the refugees keep in their hearts.

A listening ear also allows a look at the cultural differences between the Liberian refugees and the people ministering to them, which ensures a sensitivity that fosters a loving, empathic, and responsible engagement that builds stronger interpersonal relationships instead of straining a relationship that is either weak or non-existent. This adaptive process builds bridges, instead of walls, and helps both parties feel more comfortable about each other, making the ministry even more effective and fruitful. Listening to the stories of refugees, who had escaped from Liberia, is another way of establishing a communication mediated connection. It can sometimes just be valuable to be present with a refugee.

However, listening to stories is not just the stories of conflict. It is about listening to personal realities and experiences through which the pain and trauma can be better understood and, in God's grace, effectively engaged and resolved. After all, these are the memories that many refugees may not want to discuss at all because of the pain that they cause. Thus, this listening of stories includes talking with Liberian refugees about the differences between their lives in Africa and in Minnesota; the expectations they had and the realities they have to accept. Talking with them in this way builds a common ground, much like talking with new friends about the practicalities of everyday life and. Through a listening ear, the bridge of trust keeps on building until different cultures can share a walk on this bridge together. Storytelling is a uniquely

human attribute. It creates a connection between people and allows individuals to freely expressing themselves. Storytelling serves as a mean to share cultural experiences, educate, and entertain.

Refugees have powerful stories to tell today, as they did in biblical times, and this story telling can be a source of healing for refugees. These stories can be the story of the refusal of innkeepers to provide the pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph a place to stay for the night⁹ or of the deadly displeasure of a Pharaoh who felt threatened over the burgeoning Jewish population in Egypt.¹⁰ However, despite the inhospitalities, rejections, and hostilities, there were great welcomes as well, such as Abraham's ardent welcome of the three visitors in Mamre;¹¹ the Pharaoh's welcome of Joseph's father and siblings who fled from Canaan because of famine;¹² the Median priest's welcome of Moses into his house and gave his daughter to be Moses' wife;¹³ or the towns who welcomed the apostles;¹⁴ or the two Jews who welcomed Jesus into their house in Emmaus.¹⁵

Connecting with Children and Youth

It is important for the children and youth to feel connected. It is relevant to make time available to connect with children or youth through the art of playfulness and games. Making a

⁹ Matthew 2:7.

¹⁰ Exodus 1:9.

¹¹ Genesis 18:1-15.

¹² Genesis 47:1-6.

¹³ Exodus 1:21-22.

¹⁴ Luke 10:8.

¹⁵ Luke 24:29.

connection and directing children on the course of action that would best benefit them is not a simple task. It is understood that children have mind of their own and; thus, parents are faced with the challenge of convincing their children that their guidance is for the best of the child. Nowadays, many parents are preoccupied with other aspects of their lives, such as income generating activities. However, this could lead to children feeling sometimes lonely. Providing an avenue for children to discuss how they feel could be an effective way to help them resolve internal emotions.

Sport as a Tool to Help Connect with Refugees

Sports (games) can be beneficial in connecting with refugees, particularly in the social aspect. Integrating refugees in the community requires a device such as sporting activities to encourage peace, foster international understanding and promote human rights. Mutual respect between the participants is the spirit that underlines the social connection between the locals and refugees in a framework of shared interests and values.

Sports creates the opportunity to bring everyone together under one roof, therefore, reducing intolerance, overcome various differences and promote dialogue between the different cultures. Sports proves to be a key initiative to help the refugees easily settle in a host country by providing a smooth transition to adapt and adjust to the new environment. Sports provide a safe environment where refugees can deal with psychological and emotional traumas.¹⁶ Deaths of loved ones, violence, insecurity and traumatic experiences influence the refugees' state of mind, but through sports, the latter can be able to interact with peers and counselors alike. The physical

¹⁶ James Skinner, Dwight H. Zakus, and Jacqui Cowell, "Development through Sport: Building Social Capital in Disadvantaged Communities" *Sports Management Review* 11, no. 3 (2008): 259.

activity of sports brings with it the psychosocial advantages of boosting self-confidence and children have an opportunity to escape life riddled with uncertainty where they can play, laugh and share painful experiences. The Organization of Liberians in Minnesota emphasis the need that, “Each week we will have a professional who will come and talk about services, care and other issues that affects seniors. Seniors will also have the opportunity to play games and other activities.”¹⁷

After arrival, it is possible for refugees to become isolated, there is a constant loss of morale caused by being idle and bored. Sports, therefore, establish an environment of growth and recovery through participation in recreational and social activities instead of sitting back as hopeless and stagnated community. It creates a platform for building healthy relationship. The sense of belonging when sports are organized appeals to the refugees to bridge the social, cultural and economic differences that divides them with the locals.¹⁸ Participating in these sports activities by both factions assists in countering negative prejudices and stereotypes, establishing trust and an environment of shared identity is constructed as different groups learn how to get along and appreciate each other.

Sport also helps refugees to develop the skills required in different fields such as employment and education. The ripple effect of being displaced gravely affects the education and employment status of the refugees, but through sports and its accompanying skills of leadership, respect, cooperation, decision-making, and teamwork attracts prospective employers and recruits refugees into a parallel education system. The adverse effects of violence leads to

¹⁷ The Organization of Liberians in Minnesota, “Programs Enreachment,” <http://www.olmn.org> (July 20, 2018).

¹⁸ Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell, “Development through Sport,” 266.

the adoption of destructive behavior due to depression.¹⁹ The emotions of anger, fear, resentment, and isolation can depress refugees, who might turn to drugs, crime, and domestic violence as a mechanism for coping with their emotional dissonance. A controlled environment of sports provides an environment for venting aggression and frustration. The sports group also acts as a guide for these refugees not to disintegrate into conflict behavior which is the major reason for the presence of child soldiers.

Implementing a playfulness practice entails encouraging children, youth, and parents to participate in fun activities more often. Consider participation in activities, such as dancing and singing as important ways to help the children become more optimistic about different activities in life. Organizing group activities like singing and dancing groups at church would attract children to participate in religious activities. Children can also do recitals during church events; these performances would help them develop self-esteem and confidence in other realms of their life. By exposing children to a variety of fun activities, it is possible to determine their fears and what causes their anxiety. When children participate in fun activities at church, it promotes playfulness and; thus, they associate religious practice with positive emotion. Children will have less resistance to going to church and participating in other religious practices if they associate these with joy and fun. Parents would not have to force their children to undertake religious activities. When children are happy doing an activity, they are more likely to continue doing it successfully. Introducing playfulness into the children's ministry would help children to have a more positive outlook toward religious practice. The practice of playfulness would mitigate the tension that might arise as a child is taught about their religious practice; they require an open

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

mind that will allow for religious ideas to be impacted in their minds. Playfulness will allow children to deal appropriately with tough situations and challenges of life. Playfulness can cause children to experience thoughts and feelings that will help them make better decisions. For children playfulness can be a source of excitement and infusing an element of playfulness while undertaking religious activities is a good practice as it helps children find happiness in fulfilling religious obligation.

Introducing indoor or outdoor game in church help children or youth to develop skills that would help them in solving problems and making decisions. It is important to teach young children skills that will help them deal with stressful situations in life. Children and parents need to socialize in a comfortable environment. The practice of introducing gaming activities in the church or at homes. Games actively challenge the bodies and minds of youth and children. Playfulness allows a child to have a different perspective of a situation or activity. Games are a good way for children to make use of both their mental and body faculties. A weekly program for children to play game like soccer or football at the social grounds would help such children to develop both physically and mentally. Games can be challenging and push children to apply their fun and this promotes their cognitive ability. By practicing for competitions, children also improve their physical capacities and physical health. Participating in sport forces the children to listen to the instruction offered by their coach and this advances their listening skills. Sport promote a spirit of a teamwork. Sporting activities have proved to be a significant tool to integrate refugees into the social fabric of the new host country. Games are an important way to connect with refugees.

Why Minnesota

The US ideals of freedom, assembly, free speech, democracy, and democracy together with a well-constructed constitution that enriches human rights makes it an attractive destination point to refugees fleeing their home country. The refugees escape the abuse of human rights thus finds solace in the US, specifically in the state of Minnesota which has taken in refugees. These refugees come from different countries including Liberia, Somalia, Vietnam, Bosnia, Cambodia, etc. and have been accepted warmly, which is a tradition exercised in the state since the early 1900s and recently from 1979. Factors such as friendly, welcoming Minnesotans, active arts community, good schools, employment, freedom of worship, good medical care, cultural diversity, and strong social services are the motivating factors that make Minnesota a destination point for refugees. The precedence of past refugees thriving here in the past enjoying the high employment rate and affordable housing, modern refugees always exploit this situation to come into the US and join the well-settled refugee communities, friends or just families. Dependent on the backbone of the community for support and protection, the church then becomes the vital institution to assist the refugees to better their lives through hope and goals.

The Church Initiatives

The church is in a unique situation to help the refugees in their transition into the American way of life. Since some of the African economic activity is agriculture, churches have come together to provide gardens and land where the refugees can tend to their crops and therefore become self-sufficient. These agricultural activities mean that the refugees do not abandon their traditions and maintain their deep connection with the land hence their cultural identity is preserved. Similar to Brooklyn Park or Brooklyn Center in the US which houses the largest community of Liberian refugees, Minnesota is also characterized by a high population of

Liberians who live in the urban settings in apartments and homes. Some churches have striven to allocate small garden plots to as many refugees as possible. It helps to break the ethnic isolation and help them produce fresh and nutritious vegetables and fruits in the subsistence fashion.

These church-driven agricultural initiatives engage the refugees in a lot of physical exercises thus providing the much-needed economic uplift and keeping the refugees busy. Through these church-sponsored garden activities, the ministers are in a position to build a foundation of friendship with the refugees and be more personally acquainted with the neighborhood.

Community gardens help connect refugees. Both cultures, the US and Liberian way of life can be exchanged and integrated while tending to the gardens to provide an environment of peace, love, and harmony. The church congregation comprises of the local American citizens and the refugees where the former provide the land on the property of the church, help cultivate church gardens to add to the local food banks and enforce the culture of working together side by side.

The Church as an Advocate

The church organizes fundraising events to fund legal initiatives. The ministers usually liaise with volunteer lawyers who come in and the church goes to the extent of funding their trips to the capital (St. Paul) to investigate and understand the real situation concerning these refugees. The lawyers will be in a position to answer questions regarding the impact on individual refugees, particularly relating to the matter of assets, investments and if the power of attorney is needed.²⁰ Being an advocate of the Liberian refugees, the church has a responsibility to play a very significant role in their lives. The church provides advice when it comes to refugee matters

²⁰ Hana E. Brown, "Refugees, Rights, and Race: How Legal Status Shapes Liberian Immigrants' Relationship with the State," *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (2011): 151.

by inviting immigration professionals to speak to the refugees, the latter through these seminars and conferences are able to educate themselves on their status and those of their children who automatically become US citizens by birth. The fear of separation from family, friends and loved ones becomes the church's enemy that should be eliminated from the refugees' inner circle. Through the church, ministers can set up career education and resource centers, which nonprofit organizations are seeking to advance refugee lives by providing access to educational resources and leadership development.²¹ In advocating on behalf of the refugees, the ministers try as much as possible to defend their honor and contribution to the American society. The Liberians make up an essential population of work force in Minnesota.

The Church Organized Functions

The church also organizes and coordinates the refugee speakers' bureau to allow presentations by refugees to be heard by stakeholders. It becomes an opportunity for the church to educate the masses on refugee matters and provide a platform for advocacy and public speaking to the refugees. Enthusiastic speeches about life experiences by fellow refugees act as an educative and empowerment tool for the community. These forums allow personal stories to influence other refugees, address burning questions from the audience and also discuss in-depth resettlement matters. Not only adults but children and the youths are also involved in church activities as well. The church can organize youth groups that take on several tasks in the neighborhood, for example, activities involving food donation, speaking to other youths, participating in sporting activities, lobbying and organizing fundraisers. Through these activities with the assistance of the ministers, the youths can acquire scholarships, identify and develop

²¹ Ibid., 14.

sports and any other career-oriented talents, promote awareness campaigns on vulnerable youths and coming together to assist the desperate and less-fortunate. Children can also be involved in games during church fun functions such as the "Take Refuge" game that informs and educates them of refugees' lives and the obstacles they encounter through entertainment. The ministers incorporate stories from the Bible in all these activities to establish a sense of hope and belief and also forge unity and compassion in times of tranquility and disturbance.

It is evident that immediately after the arrival and settlement of refugees, the church through its ministers plays a significant role to better the lives of these refugees. Integration to the new host country always conflicts with the local's social, cultural and economic state of affairs and so, the ministers through the churches strive to preach peace and tolerance. The Liberian refugees who have lived in Minnesota for a very long time have learned to depend on the church for solace. Some of the refugees have become ministers in these churches and therefore fighting for their right to stay in the US has become a priority with imminent threats of deportation looming. Church activities such as gardening, youth groups' initiatives, children's games, sports functions, public speaking, and fundraisers have gone a long way to assist refugees with daily problems of life.

Challenges of the Refugee Ministry

While attending to the immigrants and refugees in this manner, the churches face several challenges, especially financial ones. The numbers of Liberian immigrants and refugees have been increasing in the last couple of years. However, the capacities of some churches have not been increasing, and as a result, they have strained to accommodate refugees in their congregations and still provide them with the necessary facilities. The funds they have been

receiving from donors have not been adequate to cover for the evangelical and humanitarian needs.

Beyond addressing the current challenges they are already facing, churches also need more resources to reach out to more refugees and immigrants in their communities. The church partnering with trained refugees may help in sharing the good news with other refugees. The family need to be incorporated into the program (s) as well so that they can achieve holistic development and resettlement readiness.

These challenges pose as new, but broader, challenges to the churches, which can be addressed effectively through an open-hearted process of reaching out to other churches across denominational lines, such as the Lutheran, Methodist, Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and other Christian churches who are willing to work collaboratively in addressing the Liberian refugee crisis in the American communities.

The Impact of Music

There have been concerns that refugees have raised especially when it comes to their emotional needs. Symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorders are affecting a percentage of the population in Minnesota refugee. These mental disorders can impact the functioning of the individuals in every day's life situation negatively. It is in this situation that music in the life of a refugee acts as an aiding factor to alleviate issues faced by the refugees. This section focuses on the ethnomusicology study of the impact of music among the Liberian refugee in Minnesota.

The significance of music to human is very vital. In this perspective, music has the ability to provide healing and make someone joyful. "Music has the power to cheer you up when you are feeling down, make you more joyful when you are happy, and inspire you to become a better

musician and a better Christian.”²² Music is a powerful bases of inspiration, strength and comfort. Some refugees have had to through difficult times, for example, those associated with loss of property, forced the change of locations, poor economy, marginalized living conditions and extreme change of social conditions. More than 30,000 Liberians have made Minnesota their home particularly the Twin Cities.²³ Music has played a significant role by gradually striking an emotional depth, harmony and becoming a testimony that proves the human spirit’s remarkable resilience. Unlike in most situations where music is founded upon a particular social harmonization, music among Liberian refugee can be approached as a strategy to transmit the social values in the refugees, a way to harmonize, survival strategy, balance restoration for most individuals and groups and a method in which the inexpressible human experiences in the refugee can be expressed. The progressive force of music to impact social change and its trait is one of the factors that make it an influencing aspect in the refugee situation. Among other traits is that: music recreates connection, empowers, and helps individuals forget their challenges and problems sometimes. It is a fortitude and hope installation factor, transcends ethnicity differences, builds communities and brings about reconciliations. Refugees are motivated and driven by such experiences when composing their music. Through the music, they narrate their dreadful experiences and gives thanks to those who offer them humanitarian assistance.

The healing impact brought about by music can be reflected through its soul reviving aspect and boosting the positive feelings in refugees’ lives. When situations are hard, music has the ability to offer a haven that individuals can seek refuge in. The relationship that the music

²² Momoh Freeman, “I’m a Lutheran,” *LivingLutheran*, January 2019, 13-14.

²³ Editorial Board Star Tribune, "Liberian Refugees Have Earned the Right to Stay in U.S." *Star Tribune* (2018), <http://www.startribune.com/liberian-refugees-have-earned-the-right-to-stay-in-u-s/477794963> (accessed October 10, 2018).

strikes with memory enhances atmospheric familiarity, reconciliation with the past, anxiety, and loss, soothing and the establishment of a sense of community and belonging. When you listen to the lyrics of a certain song, there are numerous pieces within the song that speak of someone's experiences, calling to mind environments, places, and individuals. Such compositions bridge the distance between them and consequently fostering the sense of closeness and familiarity. Eventually, these alleviate the feeling of loss and anxiety among refugees in Minnesota.

According to Lomax perspective towards music as a social function from his journal "Folk Song Style," music gives the listener a feeling of security given that it is a symbol of someone's origin or background.²⁴ It stimulates the religious and cultural beliefs. In essence, music serves as personality changing experiences and it is credited with the powers to unite people. Playing and listening to music helps refugee to identify with their culture and release stress. When these songs are played in a community setting or church, a revived understanding of self-worth can be instilled. It is due to the point that music has the power to unite people, enhance moral cohesion within a community, and the ability to transform social integration.

Impact of Music in the Community

Through music's capability to provide a haven for hope and familiarity, refugees are instilled with the ability to alleviate challenges that they face during the transition to a new environment. The integration of these refugees in Minnesota has strengthened the relationships between different populations in the community. Music gives a better opportunity to create a connection between people of diverse backgrounds. This is possible given that some cultures

²⁴ Alan Lomax, "Folk Song Style," *American Anthropologist* 61, no. 6 (1959): 935.
<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1525/aa.1959.61.6.02a00030> (accessed October 10, 2018).

have their own identity groups of music and musical history familiarities. Also, diversity provides an opportunity to communicate and share different cultural beliefs in a better safe environment without undermining others beliefs. Music creates a sense of belonging and enables individuals to excel in their daily lives. By sharing music within community interactions for instance churches and performances, the refugees are not only able to close the gaps between their home country and Minnesota but also have an opportunity to keep their culture alive within Minnesota context.²⁵ Furthermore, refugees have an opportunity to expose themselves to other cultures within their environment thus stretching their boundaries. The Church if possible, would also create space and encourage interaction between the community and refugees.

Additionally, community- based ways of music foster a healthy interaction. There are other factors that reinforce the importance of music within Minnesota society and its incorporation in the society. These factors encompass national conferences, gatherings, and YouTube links. The aspect of YouTube links provides a way of bridging the distance between the Liberians living in Minnesota and those in Liberia and furthermore providing a medium to share their culture in this case music in their present region Minnesota. Through music and the related performances, Liberians can garner public recognition, particularly after their public

²⁵ Janet Elizabeth Reilly, "Becoming Transnational Citizens: The Liberian Diaspora's Civic Engagement in the United States and in Homeland Peacebuilding," accessed August 20, 2018, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1097&context=gc_etds 2014.

participation and performances.²⁶ Also through musical groups, Liberians are also able to form social mechanisms that they use to network, socialize and form support avenues.²⁷

The Liberian refugees in Minnesota face adverse challenges and struggles that seem difficult to solve in the long run. Music has played a significant role in mitigating these challenges. Music is part of the modern life and having knowledge of it, one can articulate understanding towards other people's feelings, places, and cultures. Having the understanding of the refugees' needs and the therapeutic benefits music instills, people can appreciate the impact of music and its value within refugees' lives. Strategies can be explored in reference to music as a healing factor in the process to alleviate problems associated with the transition of refugees from one region to another. Additionally, institutions in Minnesota for example schools and churches need to embrace and encourage music as a rich culture to be shared among the communities. The healing power of music and its significance in provision of ways to mitigate the struggles of refugees in Minnesota cannot be undermined. Through the holistic knowledge and recognition of the importance of music in the lives of Liberian refugees in Minnesota cultures and values of the community are maintained and treasured.

The Challenge of Language

Moreover, the barriers of language can be a daunting wall to break down. Most Liberian refugees do speak and understand conversational English. That skill can be very useful in establishing an intelligible conversation with their new American neighbors. Writing skills can

²⁶ Joanna Castro Echeverri, "Transnational Truth? Telling the Truth from Abroad: Diasporas Engagement in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions," MTh, Uppsala University, 2016.

²⁷ Dulce Foster et al., "A House with Two Rooms: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia Diaspora Project," *Everyone Scattered Experiences of the Liberian Diaspora* (Saint Paul, MN: DRI Press, 2009), 301-302.

pose some difficulties, it can be corrected with a good education and practice in spoken and writing English especially in their host country. In fact, due to the global popularity of the English languages, materials for learning the language are highly accessible even to Liberian citizens living in the United States.

The problem becomes more difficult with Liberians who cannot speak the English language. The linguistic barrier is something to consider and understand its impact. Refugees who do not know English stand at a major disadvantage when it comes to finding out vital information that they need for their everyday lives. Once refugees enter a country and start to settle down, they need many of the same things that anyone needs to carry out with their everyday life, things like shelter, food, clothing, child care, and health care. Consequently, the linguistic deficiency can make daily life intimidating and stressful. Thus, someone who takes an interest in their language and their cultural traditions can provide a comforting presence despite difficulty language barriers, which can go a long way toward building common ground and social networking.

In some parts of the Twin Cities, if a Liberian refugee does not speak English or Spanish, it can be very difficult for the refugee to find his or her way around the cities, leading to a sense of a complete cessation of their own culture and language as an important tool in their engagements in the community. Christian ministers who show interest in the Liberian languages will feel respected and valued as fellow citizens, which is a major step forward towards ministering to the new Liberian brethren.

The fact is, with this barrier in communication for some refugees, a Liberian translator may be of urgent need. Thus, the language barrier poses another barrier for a successful Christian

ministry, while challenging the churches to find new ways to address the limitations, such as getting assistance from resettled Liberians who know already the English language.

In fact, as a consequence of the difficulty in breaking down the linguistic barrier with the American communities, many refugees from different countries in Africa including Liberians had put together their own community organizations to help new similar-country immigrants to find more opportunities to work, places to live, and communities where they can meet with others from their own country who share their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, Christians can join these community organizations to minister to them. With a far greater opportunity within the organization to find Liberians who already speak the English language, the linguistic barrier can be broken down and ministering to their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter becomes a joyful possibility.

Ministering and the Presentation of the Gospel

The provision of concrete Liberian refugee services establishes a strong connection between the churches and the refugee community. It creates an environment of mutual trust, which is the first step in a closer relationship and the integration of the refugee community into the Christian community. The next step is then to find ways to present the gospel in a way that is non-intrusive but, instead, as an organic part of building the human connection. When the refugees feel that the church is genuinely interested in their own well-being, evangelism has a much greater likelihood of success. Offering a space for the refugees to hold Christian services in their own language and welcoming them to the church's existing services are helpful steps at this point in the community integration. Offering prayers and praying with refugees bring some form of psychological and sociocultural release. Praying for hope, peace, protection, healing, and strength are preferred. Reading scriptures is also important during home visits. Music serve

significant role when it comes to therapy. Refugees and immigrants are deeply rooted in cultural and traditional practices and beliefs.

If the refugees and their families do not have Bibles in their native language, this would be a welcome step for church members to take. It is important to respect boundaries that people have in the area of evangelism, but these steps are appropriate after building connections in such a way to show that the church wants to help the refugees set up a comfortable life in the Twin Cities.

Ministering the Word of God is the duty of every missionary or Christian. The Bible also encourages that ministers should spread the word of God to all corners of the world. It is possible to believe that some refugees and immigrants, however, may not have the opportunity to get to hear the gospel due to their circumstances. Therefore, evangelists and ministers see the need to get the gospel to these people. They do this with collaborations with both local and international organizations.

However, the challenge confronting the Christian church, as mentioned above, can pose a formidable obstacle in the presentation of the Gospel. Thus, the church should find a way, despite the lack of adequate funds and resources, to reach out to all the Liberian refugees.

Conclusion

The chapter has presented ways with which Christians can assist the Liberian refugees. It has also explored the challenges of funds and language and the high potential of spreading the Good News among the Liberian refugees. The chapter explores various strategies that American Christian ministers can utilize to relate to the refugees and to usher them to understanding Christianity and giving their lives to Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES THAT THE REFUGEES FACE

Introduction

This chapter explores several challenges that the Liberian refugees face upon their resettlement in the United States. It starts with the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) and closes with the mission of Christian Americans as good Samaritans to the refugees. The difficulties experienced by these refugees stem from the fact that they are present in a foreign country and have to live a new reality. Although these individuals move to new areas to seek better opportunities and safety.

The UNHCR Factor

As occupants in a foreign country, the Liberian refugees are bound to experience challenges, such as separation from family, language barrier, education, healthcare, raising children, and finding jobs. Presently, refugees have large population in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center of Minnesota. Depending on a refugee's personality, the experiences could either be helpful or detrimental. For refugees with strong personalities, the experience could be a motivation to strive for success. On the other hand, the one with frail personalities could be broken down by the adversities attached to the refugee status.

Many years ago, the UNHCR had created a program to admit refugees in the United States. Most states responded to the call and welcomed refugees admitted through the refugee program. On its part, Minnesota has willingly accepted refugees into its state and has the large

population of Liberian refugees in the United States, according to Minneapolis Foundation.¹ The suburbs of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center are the main areas where they settled.

Challenges of the Liberian Refugees

However, although life is better for the Liberian refugees in the United States than in their first and second countries of asylum, there are still many struggles they have to face, such as language barrier, education, healthcare, jobs, housing, transportation, family structure, and cultural barrier.

Language Barrier

English is one of the difficult languages for people to learn, if they do not grow up speaking it. Think about all the irregularities, both of forming different tenses of verbs and simply pronouncing it. If you look at the words *though*, *through*, and *cough*, you might expect them to rhyme, but all three of them have different pronunciations for the diphthong “*ough*.”

A lot of people like to point out that refugees in the United States should learn English as soon as possible. But if you’re trying to nail down a full-time job, raise some children and make some sort of life for your family, finding time to go sit in an English as a second language (ESL) class can be beyond what many people can do.

Liberian children, however, are a different case. Once exposed to the language among native English speakers, either in the community or in the school, they easily learn English even far more than their parents.

¹ The Minneapolis Foundation, “Immigration in Minnesota: Discovering Common Ground,” <http://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/uploads/cuteeditor/publications/community/immigrationbrochure.pdf> (accessed July 20, 2018).

Education

The younger refugees face obstacles in the educational system. Coming to America with little to no education, left the children in difficult learning situations especially concerning technology. Sometimes the children perform below standard. Additionally, the single-family homes of some Liberian refugees left them significantly behind in school.

Education, however, is not always a happy undertaking or a safe objective for Liberian children. Within the school system, not all the people that refugee children meet are as friendly as those that they should encounter in the church. Bullying can be a serious factor for children who enter the American school system from a place, like Liberia, and even in ethnically diverse school systems.

Many school systems in the United States place children in grade levels according to their biological age rather than accounting for their academic ability, which can place children and adolescents in situations that are frustrating or humiliating, because sometimes they lack the skills to succeed academically. Because there can be a language or culture barrier between the parents and the teachers and school administration, it may not be possible for a parent to intervene on behalf of a child when something happens that causes a real concern.

Healthcare

Health care problems also arose for refugees in Minnesota as they were not receiving needed care. Although many medical services are available, culture and communication keep some refugees from seeking treatment for needed ailments. Mental health is another healthcare challenge among refugees. When it comes to mental health care, they are no exception. They fled their country and led a chaotic and unstable life, living each day without a sense of safety, not just for months but for, leading to a life. The trauma that has taken place is going to keep these

people from performing at their best in a strange place and among strange people who do not know their language. If going to a psychiatrist and talking about personal problems is unnecessary or even silly in the American culture, the exercise is even more frowned on in the Liberian culture. Adding to the already difficult adjustment situation, some refugees may not even know how to reach out and get help as a consequence of the linguistic barrier. When refugees do access services, the health care providers may have a difficult time and may make mistakes in suggesting proper remedies.

Jobs

Finding a job can be a real headache for refugees who have just arrived in the Twin Cities. In addition to the language barrier, there is also the frustration that refugees cannot find work at the same professional level in the United States that they could in their home country. So you end up with nurses, doctors and teachers working in manual labor or other low-wage positions simply because they cannot transfer their certifications from Liberia to the United States and American employers generally prefer work history that takes place inside the nation's borders. So you might have a waiter or a taxi driver from Liberia who was a civil engineer or a teacher back in Liberia.

It is unfortunate for some refugees. When someone comes into an office looking for a job, sometimes an employer notices the different sounding English and looks at the application to see that the candidate just showed up from another country and is probably desperate to find a job, so they will assign them something that is more menial simply because the candidate needs work.

Housing

Getting a place to live is also a challenge for many refugees. Housing that is both safe and affordable is difficult to find in just about every major American city, and the Twin Cities are no exception. So for many refugees, the decision to have several generations of one family living together, or having two households led by brothers living in one residence, is not just a choice but it's an economic necessity. So they end up with a house that is crowded and loud, which makes it difficult to get a good night's sleep, and it makes it really hard for the kids to come home and get their homework done in a quiet environment.

There are some landlords who will exploit this situation by charging fees for maintenance and for property care (such as removing bedbugs) that American tenants would know they do not have to accept. The refugees are new to the country and do not often know the laws that support tenant's rights and they come from a place where such rights do not exist either. This allows many landlords to get away with poor treatment of the people who have come to live in their units.

Transportation

When it comes to transportation, even in the Twin Cities, getting around can be a real hassle, more so than it was in Liberia (at least before the civil war broke out). American cities are spread out to a degree, because of the basic assumption that most people have a car. Unfortunately, the Liberian refugees some don't have car. Getting a driver's license itself can be a hassle. In some driver's license bureau, getting processed can take about 45 minutes to an hour, sitting in line and waiting for one's turn to come up. This time-demanding process often means taking off a significant amount of time from work. For some Liberian refugees, a translator may

even be necessary to help navigate the system, or someone who understand the system well to come along and spend the time in the refugee's behalf for a fee.

For the written examination, literacy is a necessity, even beyond the driving skills that a Liberian refugee may possess. Checking the wrong answer in the examination, for the simple reason of not understanding the questions themselves, can mean failing to get a driver's license. Conversely, if a family is fortunate enough to have one car to share, there still may be many more needs than that one vehicle can provide: two parents work; several kids got to be brought to school and picked up; and so on. While school buses can solve the problem for the kids, a single car cannot bring both spouses to work, especially when they work in different areas in the state. Oftentimes, the husband takes the car and the wife has to rely on her friends or co-workers to get a ride where she needs to go. With this transportation issue unresolved, the question of getting needed services, such as going to medical appointments, taking ESL classes, and the rest, simply fall off the table because there is not enough transportation to go around.

Fortunately, the Twin Cities do have a public transportation network that is highly accessible to citizens without, private vehicles. However, this can be confusing to use, even for people who grew up in Minneapolis and St. Paul. If a refugee comes from rural Liberia, even traffic signals and loud horns can be scary, making just crossing the streets an overwhelming process. In such a context, asking which stop to dismount for specific destinations, or to change to the next bus in route to work, can be doubly unnerving. Thus, even the availability of a mass transportation system can render the necessary mobility of Liberian refugees highly limited and constrained.

Family Structure

Family structure for the refugees also posed difficulties for them as they were often separated from their families and found it difficult to adjust to the new culture. Raising children in this foreign culture is also a significant challenge for many refugees from Liberia. American culture involves many things that represent almost an alien planet in comparison to what children grow up with in Liberia.

Once children learn enough English to understand these influences, this can cause some confusion in these new Americans. Given that children generally pick up English much more quickly than their parents, they are in school systems that teach them the language while their parents are at work, and studies show that children learn foreign languages more quickly than adults and then this trend away from parental authority can accelerate even further.

Cultural Barriers

Finally, there are many cultural barriers that volunteers and agency workers find when they help refugees. There are differences in the way that people view gender roles, for instance, and there are differences between what people consider to be enjoyable activities in the United States and in Liberia, as they are elsewhere.

Mission of the Good Samaritan

It is important to remember that life as a refugee is a traumatic experience. It is good to work more effectively to serve those who have gone through these types of situations and give them what they need to develop a sense of comfort and contentment in their new lives in the

United States. It is about being our brethren's keepers.² It is about being a Good Samaritan.³ Refugees need pastoral care to go along with humanitarian care.

Conclusion

The chapter has presented the diverse and almost overwhelming challenges that the Liberian refugees are facing in their resettlement in the Twin Cities. It proposed an argument that, at the face of these challenges, the mission of the Christian Americans is to be good Samaritans to their refugee brethren. This chapter explores the various issues that Liberian Refugees encounter as they try to resettle in a foreign nation. The chapter examines various problems like unemployment, housing issues, barriers to education, inadequate housing, forgotten or destroyed social ties and so forth. Some of these issues make life difficult for the refugees even as they try to move on from the horrific experiences they have encountered in their countries.

² Genesis 4:9.

³ Luke 10:25-37.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE BLESSINGS THAT REFUGEES BRING

Introduction

This chapter starts with benefits associated with the welcoming of Liberian refugees in the midst of the American community and explores the value of building bridges for the refugee brethren. Several refugees that come into the United States are highly skilled, hold advanced degrees and come with exceptional skill sets, experiences and perspectives.¹ Furthermore, the chapter also focuses on promoting a good relationship between the Liberian refugees and the American government to ensure that they can form a strong relationship. Most of the refugees come with various skills, talents and academics experiences as well as qualifications. However, they need to be given the chance to continue exploring these traits. The American government is encouraged to offer these individuals opportunities to make a living and to provide them the necessary amenities and tools to help them make a difference in their lives, community, and in the lives of their people.

Risks and Benefits

Every event is associated with risks and benefits. The same possibilities apply to the refugee issue. It is understandable that people in the United States will notice the influx of

¹ International Institute of Minnesota, “Refugee Resettlement,” <https://iimn.org/for-employers> (accessed November 2, 2018).

refugees. It is so because anything people do not understand, they fear.² In fact, they may even slander as well what they do not understand.³

However, it is wrong to underestimate the potential positive contributions that the Liberian refugees can contribute to the American society if they are given the opportunities and the necessary support to get resettled peacefully. Experience indicates that both refugees and other immigrants usually turn out to be productive members of their new society. The International Institute of Minnesota has observed that many refugees that migrate into the United States are skilled, educated, and come with unique skill sets, perspectives, and experiences. Refugees are strengthened by misfortune, and they make proficient, resilient, and loyal employees.⁴ While some become successful entrepreneurs, others study to become top professionals in their chosen fields, such as nursing, law, engineering, education, religion, and medicine.

Moreover, the entry of refugees into the United States enriches further its current level of diversity. America is already a highly diverse society; adding Liberians contribute to this diversity. With their unique contribution to the ethnic diversity of the American society comes as well a new set of giftedness, of skills and cultural treasures that can help improve the way of society in the United States. Thus, it is not merely a contribution of new skills or even knowledge. It is also about enriching the American society. Immigrants had contributed significantly to the state of Minnesota.

² Bryian K. Revoner, *The Fear of Being Challenged: Democratically Independent; I Am the Realocrat* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010), 229.

³ Jude 1:10.

⁴ International Institute of Minnesota, "For Employers," <https://iimn.org> (accessed November 2, 2018).

The Fearless Love

Before the global refugee problem, the greatest barrier to love is fear.⁵ Fear cannot breed a genuine concern for refugees and their resettlement.

The refugee resettlement issue in the United States has been, and is currently, subject to ominous fears, which engender a deep misunderstanding among other things.⁶ The fear of welcoming refugees to their communities. They understand, empathize, and are even moved by their plight. However, they feared that these ‘strangers’ might constitute a risk—a fatal risk—to their lives. Behind these doubts are valid concerns that must be addressed, so that a clear, not lukewarm, decision must be made. Beyond security risks, the refugee resettlement questions also include cultural, economic, and religious risks.

Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir identify several legitimate fears that form as barriers to American Christians’ willful support to the refugee resettlement cause. These fears include fear of naïve, imprudent, and even dangerous behavior;⁷ fear of economic drain,⁸ fear based on a mistaken notion of illegality of refugee settlement,⁹ and fear of non-Christian refugees.¹⁰

⁵ Margaret Franz, “Will to Love, Will to Fear: The Emotional Politics of Illegality and Citizenship in the Campaign against Birthright Citizenship in the US,” *Social Identities* 21, no. 2 (2015): 184-198.

⁶ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Isam Smeir, “No Fear in Love: Grappling with Genuine Concerns over Refugee Resettlement,” in *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

Evidently, an important concern among evangelical Christians over the issue of refugee resettlement is the economy.¹¹ Aware of the economic struggle, on a monthly basis, among many Americans today, they argued that the economic impact of more refugees resettled in the country can render the economic burden unsustainable. He insisted, however, that economists disagreed that the refugee resettlement net cost will be unsustainable based on three observations. First, since immigrants are consumers, their spending behavior (e.g., rent or mortgage and purchases of goods and services) will boost economic activity in the country. Second, immigrants tend to work in jobs (e.g., cow milking, nursing) and fields (e.g., agriculture) that are complementary to those of the American workers.¹² Finally, at least among other benefits beyond the scope of this paper, immigrants increase the tax revenues of the government more than the government benefits they receive.¹³

Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir argued that the fear for non-Christian refugees reflects the fear of the Muslim refugees who are currently being associated with terrorism.¹⁴ The fear came from the possibility that many of those Muslim refugees are, in fact, terrorists.

However, the facts, evidently, did not support this fear. Even among the refugees who came from the Middle East, certain percent belong to the most vulnerable groups (i.e., women and below age 14 children). Moreover, the U.S. government takes reasonable time to screen applications for refugee status, which can take from 18 months to three years.¹⁵ UNHCR alone

¹¹ Ibid., 66.

¹² Ibid., 67.

¹³ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

has a list of seven criteria to prioritize refugees for resettlement, and with an eye for resettlement as a rare-case option.¹⁶ Moreover, it takes a long time for a refugee to get resettled in the United States (or any third resettlement country) from the point he or she is granted the refugee status.¹⁷

Building Bridges and Not Walls

In the United States, it can be difficult for refugees to find positions within their professions based on the desire of American employers to hire people with a U.S.-based work history. Moreover, many, maybe if not all, professional certifications in Liberia, or any other third-world nations, sometimes do not receive the same credits in the United States. Evidently, there is a need for the country to establish professional bridges for professionals from other countries, including refugees and immigrants, much like other initiatives on the line as made available in such country as the United Kingdom. These countries have ongoing initiatives, which had sprung up in the past in order to make refugee and immigrant transition easier.

It might be argued, as is often heard in the United States and elsewhere, that the refugees should not have a right to jobs that Americans could fill. However, there are simply jobs in the United States that even Americans cannot fill. The United States, for instance, is currently facing a growing shortage of teachers, nurses, doctors, pastors, and low skills workers, which had been estimated to reach as high. This professional gap indicates that the country itself is needing help from other professionals and nonprofessionals that may not be of American origin, ancestry, or citizenship.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

Moreover, it is not only medicine that is currently facing this type of professional resource problem. According to a 2016 study, U.S. classrooms had faced a shortage of 60,000 teachers during the 2015-16 school year, a gap that could swell to more than 70,000 by the 2018-19 school year.¹⁸ Given these known gaps, there is, evidently, enormous room for growth in certain accelerated professions, not just those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. People who can come in and perform those under-filled jobs should be welcomed and valued, no matter where they come from.

Conclusion

The chapter has recognized the benefits associated with the influx of the Liberian refugees to the United States. It argues that the benefits are clear as well. Moreover, it strongly proposed the building of the bridges with the Liberian refugees and do away with the option of building walls. The chapter makes readers understand that chances are understandable on the government's perspective but that benefits exist too. Furthermore, it expounds on how Liberian refugees can build bridges with the American people and the American Government rather than building walls. It is therefore possible for a collective agreement to be reached between the American Government and the refugees. Embracing love will allow the two parties to have a mutually beneficial relationship that can give rise to great things.

¹⁸ Joe Helm, "America Has a Teacher Shortage, and a New Study Says It's Getting Worse," https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/america-has-a-teacher-shortage-and-a-new-study-says-its-getting-worse/2016/09/14/d5de1cee-79e8-11e6-beac-57a4a412e93a_story.html?utm_term=.fbdc3b17286e (accessed August 21, 2018).

CHAPTER SIX

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AMONG REFUGEES

Introduction

Liberia has been affected by the civil war for a long period of time, and as a result, the citizens migrated *en masse* in search of safety and security to various foreign countries. Some of the refugees from the country migrated to Minnesota in the US in the hope that the war would abate, so they return to their home country. However, as the refugees settled in Minnesota, the horrific experiences that they had faced led to post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), hence influencing every aspect of their lives. Some of the refugees have witnessed great massacres in their villages, towns, cities, and counties, and the refugees were traumatized from the devastating effects. This chapter focuses on the impacts of post-traumatic stress disorder among the Liberian refugees having been impacted by the civil war in Liberia.

On the Clutches of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Despite their renowned resilience, in general, refugees are victims of persecution (e.g. childhood neglect, combat exposure, kidnapping, loss of family, physical and psychoemotional abuse, and torture).¹ They are grieving, traumatized, and bearing physical, psychological, and

¹ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Isam Smeir, *Helping without Hurting: Understanding the Challenges to Refugee Adjustment in Seeking Refuge on the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 136.

spiritual scars.² They cannot heal unless their grief has subsided; their trauma resolved; and their scars ceased to be troublesome to carry.

Unlike ordinary losses, many persecution survivors, like refugees, often exhibit consistently high alertness (e.g., exaggerated startle response, avoidance or refusal to discuss the traumatic experience or emotional numbness, and invasive memories this condition which are characteristic symptoms of *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD), that often debilitates their normal lives and even affect their capability to make a living or integrate in the communities where they resettled. Oftentimes, this disability, or at least the internal struggle, can be prolonged. The UNHCR estimate pegged the PTSD rate among refugees at a minimum of 39 percent, while the general population only recorded around one percent.³ Moreover, it has been estimated that approximately 89 percent of PTSD cases, in children and adults, co-existed with different psychological disorders (e.g., anxiety disorders, intermittent explosive or anger disorder, depression, phobias, and substance abuse).⁴

Intrusive memories are what Bauman referred to as “Hot memories.”⁵ These memories are stored through the amygdala, the center in the brain that detects threats and alerts the body to respond accordingly. Unlike “cold memories,” which are chronologically ordered, they are fragmented and stored as feelings, images, physiological responses, scents, thoughts, and voices. They generate intense and adverse emotions, such as horror or helplessness (or both). PTSD among refugees would be long-lasting.

² Ibid., 133.

³ Ibid., 135.

⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁵ Ibid., 138.

PTSD and the Church

Elbert and Schauer believed that trauma is an injury to the human soul.⁶ Thus, persons, like resettled refugees, who are exposed to extreme trauma, which led to PTSD, are broken persons. Since they are one of the most traumatized groups, their souls are significantly broken as well, which made them in serious need for care and ministering towards healing. Irrational thoughts that keep on haunting them establish in them negative emotions of anger, fear, guilt, and shame. In such a broken condition, resettled refugees badly and urgently need the healing ministrations of Christ through the church.

The Liberian refugees suffered from terrible and violent atrocities in their homeland. The rebels terrorized their villages and brutalized adults and children alike. These warring parties destroyed their homes, their properties, lives of their families and friends, and even their lives as they knew it. Consequently, the Liberian refugees fled their homes, not by their own full will, but as an only option to survive and protect their families from death. They hoped that outside their homeland, there will be safety, peace, bounty, and refuge.

Unfortunately, from settlement to settlement, refugees, in general and not just Liberians, may even have encountered more deep-seated psychological, and sometimes physical, trauma than can be expected in any exposure to ordinary stress or physical injuries. Outside the war zone, they suffered interrogations at each border crossing points, some experienced confinement temporarily, and may even suffer harassment, and others, including those they would have expected to protect them. Consequently, they need the healing signs of God through the hands of today's Christians.

⁶ Thomas Elbert and Maggie Schauer, "Burnt into Memory," *Nature* 412 (2002): 883.

Intensive Fear

The founding of the West African country by the former slaves created a classed society where the emancipated slaves directed similar injustices to native people.⁷ Thus, the emergence of the civil war was informed by the protest that the indigenous populations made towards the ruling classes. The indigenous people felt that they were excluded from major political decisions in the country and this created the tension that eventually led to the civil war. With the emergence of the war, thousands of people were killed through organized conflict where the neighbors turned against each other, with the aim to control the political processes in the country. Following the 1980 *coup d'etat* when Samuel Doe overthrew the militant government, there was a sense of instability as the new leaders eradicated the cohesiveness that had held the country together for long. The invasion by Charles Taylor led to the emergence of the civil war that had devastating impacts on the majority of the citizens. The effect of the war was so much that more than one-third of the population was forced into exile.

Following the atrocities against the populations in the country the individuals were traumatized. A minority of the fleeing refugees had witnessed mass killings and destruction, leading to an intense fear of returning to their country. Most of the fleeing refugees were traumatized by the experiences. A substantial number of the refugees settled in Minnesota but the group was still coming to terms with what they had witnessed in their home country. Due to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the refugees had a problem in the performance of the tasks.⁸ Some of the refugees had a problem focusing on the daily activities which included the

⁷ Patricia Shannon et al., "Screening for War Trauma, Torture, and Mental Health Symptoms among Newly arrived Refugees: A National Survey of US Refugee Health Coordinators," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 10, no. 4 (2012): 380-394.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

work and the formation of the relationships. They had problems sleeping.⁹ The implication is that it was not easy for the refugees to resolve the challenges that they were facing.

The Impact of PTSD on Women

The refugees continued to show depression signs which hampered their functionality in the various aspects of their lives. The horrific experiences also led to depression. Traditionally, Liberian women were in charge of taking care of the children and the family. On the other hand, the men was in charge of providing for the family. However, in the face of PTSD cases among the refugees, the men could no longer guarantee to serve the role of providing for the entire family.¹⁰ As a result, the women were expected to play a more economic role to provide for the needs of the family. Hence it could be argued that PTSD shifted the traditional gender roles so that the females had to take more active roles of providing for the families.¹¹ Some women also suffered forced marriages and torture as they endeavored to cope with the challenges in the refugee camps. The issue was compounded by the statement that they had to take care of the young children even with little education. Some of the women had lost their husbands during the war, compelling the women to take more domestic roles and responsibilities.¹² Due to depression

⁹ Shanee Stepakoff et al., "Trauma Healing in Refugee Camps in Guinea: A Psychosocial Program for Liberian and Sierra Leonean Survivors of Torture and War," *American Psychologist* 61, no. 8 (2006): 921.

¹⁰ Amit Etkin, and Tor D. Wager. "Functional Neuroimaging of Anxiety: A Meta-analysis of Emotional Processing in PTSD, Social Anxiety Disorder, and Specific Phobia," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 10 (2007): 1476-88.

¹¹ Kirsten Johnson, et al., "Association of Combatant Status and Sexual Violence with Health and Mental Health Outcomes in Postconflict Liberia," *Jama* 300, no. 6 (2008): 676-690.

¹² Alexander Vu, et al., "The Prevalence of Sexual Violence among Female Refugees in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis" *PLoS Currents* 6 (2014):1-16.

and illnesses, sometimes the women could not effectively participate in decision-making processes that affected their own lives.

Emotional Problems

Due to PTSD, the refugees experienced a wide range of emotional issues. In one of the studies, the refugees reported struggling with anger, and although they did not state why they experienced the anger, many analysts attributed the problem to PTSD. Participants in the study indicated a higher level of anger than before the civil war.¹³ Further, the family members without the understanding of the people living with PTSD disrespected the survivors and thus turned their anger against each other. There were conflicts in the families, leading to the emergence of more problems at the family level.

Denial and Forgetfulness

Some Liberians who had experienced the distressing experiences of the war indicated that they were not willing to talk about the experiences. Others could provide only a fragmented account of their experiences, indicating that PTSD was affecting their capacity to remember the incidents. In one of the study, it was clear that the participants could not tell that they gave a disorganized version of their experiences. The implication is that PTSD had a toll on their memories, while other remember.¹⁴

¹³ Marija Bogic, Anthony Njoku, and Stefan Priebe, "Long-Term Mental Health of War-Refugees: A Systematic Literature Review," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 15, no. 1 (2015): 29.

¹⁴ Patrick Vinck, and Phuong N. Pham, "Association of Exposure to Intimate-Partner Physical Violence and Potentially Traumatic War-Related Events with Mental Health in Liberia," *Social Science & Medicine* 77 (2013): 41-49.

Healing in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

To the ancient Israelites of the Old Testament, God was *Jehovah-Rapha* (“The Lord Who Heals”),¹³⁵ which reflects an ancient belief of God as essentially a healer. He healed the hand of Moses from leprosy;¹³⁶ proclaimed his healing care for the outcast that was Zion,¹³⁷ for the land of Israel,¹³⁸ and for the restoration of the blind and deaf;¹³⁹ restored, through Jeremiah, the life of the son of a Gentile widow,¹⁴⁰ and healed, through Elisha, the leprosy of the Israelite servant girl of a Syrian army commander.¹⁴¹ God was able to heal people in the Old and New Testament. People were used by God to bring about healing.

In fact, through his healing grace, God extended his love both to his people the Israelites and the gentiles who sought his help.¹⁴² Prophets, like Jeremiah, sought God for healing and salvation.¹⁴³ Thus, the land that God healed was also the land that God saved. The afflicted persons that God healed were also the people that God saved.

Jesus brought the same sign of God’s presence to the Jews of the New Testament. In fact, gospel writers made clear links between the healing ministry of Jesus and the healing works of

¹³⁵ Exodus 15:26.

¹³⁶ Exodus 4:1-8.

¹³⁷ Jeremiah 30:17.

¹³⁸ 2 Chronicles 7:14.

¹³⁹ Isaiah 35:4-6.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Kings 17:22-23.

¹⁴¹ 2 Kings 5:14.

¹⁴² Walter Brueggemann, “The Uncared For Now Cared For (Jer. 30:12-17): A Methodological Consideration,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 3 (1985): 420-421.

¹⁴³ Jeremiah 17:24.

Yahweh among the ancient Israelites.¹⁴⁴ Matthew 4:23-25, for instance, testified that Jesus healed “every disease and sickness among the people,” including severe pain, demoniacs, those with seizures, and paralytics. He healed a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:1-4), the Roman centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13), Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17), two demoniacs (Matthew 8:28-34), and two blind men.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the miracles Jesus performed were healing miracles, except for the calming of the storm.¹⁴⁶

Subsequently, Mark testified for similar healing miracles by Jesus: that of a demoniac (Mark 1:23-28); a leper (Mark 1:40-45); and a paralyzed man.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Luke echoed some of the healing miracles of Jesus, such as, the restoration of sight and hearing,¹⁴⁸ and a cut earlobe.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, John testified of four distinct healing miracles, not previously specified by the three synoptic gospel writers, namely: that of a nobleman’s son;¹⁵⁰ the paralytic man at a pool;¹⁵¹ a man who was blind from birth;¹⁵² and the raising of Lazarus back from death.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁴ Wayne Baxter, “Healing and the Son of God: Matthew’s Warrant,” *Novum Testamentum* 48, no. 1 (2006): 36.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 8:23-27.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 8:23-27.

¹⁴⁷ Mark 2:1-7.

¹⁴⁸ Luke 4:18; 7:20-22.

¹⁴⁹ Luke 22: 50-51.

¹⁵⁰ John 4:50-53.

¹⁵¹ John 5:8-9.

¹⁵² John 9:1-7.

¹⁵³ John 11:43-44.

Evidently, the saving ministry of Jesus was essentially a healing ministry in its entirety, including his death on the cross, an act that ‘restored’ mankind in grace before God. He cared not just for the salvation of the soul, but as well for the healing of the body.¹⁵⁴ This salvation had been associated, as well, with the release of captives and prisoners,¹⁵⁵ which received echoes from the Old Testament, including the mending of the broken.¹⁵⁶ The apostles, as well, had been commissioned to extend Christ’s healing ministry in their life as a church.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, detailed accounts of the healing miracles performed through the apostles followed in Acts 3:1-10 and Acts 5:5-7. Peter and John healed a lame man near the temple,¹⁵⁸ while Peter healed demoniacs, paralytics, and those others with illnesses.¹⁵⁹ Philip also healed the cripples, paralytics, and demoniacs.¹⁶⁰ In the meantime, Paul performed healing miracles and cast out evil from demoniacs through the power of God.¹⁶¹ The early Christians, as well, worked great wonders in healing the sick.¹⁶² Obviously, the Christian vocation, from the time of Christ and the early church, involves preaching the gospel, loving God, and loving one another. The

¹⁵⁴ Lois Malcolm and Janet Ramsey, “On Forgiveness and Healing: Narrative Therapy and the Gospel Story,” *Word and World* 30, no. 1 (2010): 29.

¹⁵⁵ Luke 4:18.

¹⁵⁶ Isaiah 61:1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Mark 13:13-15, Luke 9:1-2.

¹⁵⁸ Acts 3:5-7.

¹⁵⁹ Acts 5:15-16.

¹⁶⁰ Acts 8:7.

¹⁶¹ Acts 19:11-12.

¹⁶² Acts 5:12.

mission of God must continue because Jesus came, like a physician, for the sick, ministering to them in love.¹⁶³

Following the civil war in Liberia, the horrific experiences contributed to PTSD. The disorder was significant as it had a lot of effects on the community. Depression was one of the impacts that contributed much to disorganizing the families. Some of the refugees demonstrated a high level of denial and forgetfulness affecting the day-to-day operations. On the other hand, a significant section of the populations turned to God in prayer while other turn to counseling with the objective to achieve a relief.

Conclusion

Following the civil war in Liberia, the horrific experiences contributed to a lot of emotional illnesses including PTSD. The disorder was significant as it had effects on some refugees. Depression was one of the impacts that contributed much to disorganizing the families. Some of the refugees demonstrated a high level of denial and forgetfulness affecting the day-to-day operations. On the other hand, a significant section of the populations turned to God in prayers and other resources with the objective to achieve a short-term relief.

¹⁶³ Mark 2:17

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The case for helping refugees from Liberia find a new home in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis & St. Paul) centers on the biblical call for solidarity of mankind. The manner in which the Christians of today, particularly in the United States, directly measures the authenticity of such Christian faith, which must be subservient to the will of God and to the new commandment of Christ to love the neighbors in the same love that Christians love themselves.

Finding ways to help foster the accomplishment of each Liberian refugee who knocks a Christian's door is a calling for each of the professed Christians in the United States. Paying attention to the needs of the brethren from Liberia brings to the whole Christian community a grace it would not otherwise receive. The grace of unity sprouts from the necessary coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between members of all churches who work together for this same social cause.

The hope is that all American Christians are working for one another in bringing home to the Twin Cities the displaced brethren from Liberia. The hope is that the chaos that these brethren escaped from the dreadful civil war will eventually disappear, replaced by the harmony of an entire society working together for the common good of all in a new life the Liberian refugees and their family. This is the way of showing love from the Lord Jesus Christ. And welcoming Liberian refugees in the Twin Cities is the proof for such a love.

Given the complexity of the human motivations that justify their actions, good or evil, a Christian project of changing the worldviews of violent groups in society, such as rebels or

terrorists, to let go of their arms and walk the peaceful path can be more complex than many Christians may expect. Militant evil may not be converted by sacrificial confrontation with the message of peace and love. The problem of evil is complex and may take generations to correct, given a sustainable path of good relationships is maintained.

Rebuilding broken relationships may work in peaceful and non-violent communities, which makes it a valuable recourse. However, relationships that are so badly broken may not be restored even with good intentions. Instead, with a unified Christian prayer for the grace of God to work miracles in the hearts of evil people, perhaps the path to peace will be more achievable and lasting. A grace-filled goodness must be spread as far as can be into this world, hoping that even the violent ones may find grace and goodness extremely attractive to refuse. That goodness may begin with loving our neighbor-refugees with a heart overflowing with divine love.

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