

PRAY POSTED ON FEBRUARY 14, 2018

Pray for Ray Schellinger, global consultant for Immigrants and Refugees, helping with ministries to refugees globally.



Ray networks with IM colleagues and international partners that serve with refugees and displaced peoples, helping to strengthen their ministries, find needed resources and build capacity. He works to construct bridges between U.S. and P.R. churches and these partners, providing opportunities to serve some of the most vulnerable people in the world. In addition, Ray hosts several teams per year in international cross-cultural settings where they can learn about the struggles of migrants, the realities of global immigration and border policies.

Ray writes – I have just had the opportunity to meet and interview a man named Marcos from Mexico who has lived in the U.S. since he was a young child. Marcos is a dreamer ... [the sad story of Marcos immigration status follows. Read the full account and Ray's full journal at

<https://www.internationalministries.org/comfort-o-comfort-my-people/>]

He continues: In this past year, I have had a great deal of opportunities, way too many opportunities, to share with people who are also between worlds, with nowhere that they can call home. I have met with Rohingya families in their makeshift tents in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. For generations they have been stateless, as their own government of Myanmar won't recognize their rights to citizenship, freedom of movement, or speech, or anything. Earlier this year, the military began a campaign to rid the country completely of the Rohingya people. More than 600,000 have fled into Bangladesh and are huddled in camps organized by UNHCR, IOM and a number of other non-governmental relief organizations. They can't stay long, as Bangladesh is trying to force them to leave. No other country wants to offer them refuge. A bilateral solution has been developed that would send these people into permanent fenced-in camps in Myanmar, with no freedom to leave, no education, no nothing. They yearn to have a place of their own, where they are free to worship God as they know God, to farm their own lands without interference and to live in peace. They long for a home that they have never really known.

This is the same story I have found in Jordan and Lebanon, with Syrian and Iraqi refugees that have no place to go—no way to go back to a destroyed country in the grip of destruction and warfare—and have no way to stay in countries that don't want them and will give them no rights. The Christians from Iraq particularly have been singled out, and after living in their homeland since biblical times, there is nothing left for them to go back to. Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon cannot work or own property, and they are barely able to survive. In a striking similarity to the Rohingya in Bangladesh, they have no way to pass on any nationality to their children. Neither their ancestral homelands nor their host countries will confer on any of them citizenship. The next generation, growing up in the refugee camps, will be truly people with no country. As far as the world is concerned, it seems, these people don't belong anywhere. They do not even belong on earth. It is little consolation to them that we people of faith tell them that they are indeed beloved children of God. These are empty words if we as people of faith never do anything to welcome them to a place where they can finally belong, a place they can call home.

In our world today, there are about 25 million people living as refugees, recognized as such by the UN High Commission on Refugees, but not recognized by just about anybody else. If things continue as they are, most of them will be in squalid camps for their entire lives. Already, three generations of Palestinians have only ever known life in refugee camps. There are another 65 million internally displaced persons around the world, forced from home by violence, persecution and disaster.

My heart is aching for the people I have met ... I am moved every time by the communities of faith in each and every refugee site that are sacrificing everything they have to serve the neediest in their midst. They have been a constant inspiration and example to me.

There is this wonderful passage from Isaiah 40 that has come to my mind again and again. It was God's word of compassion for a nation of forcibly displaced people, the people of Judah subjected to exile in Babylon. These too were people who longed for home.

"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to them...."

To the exiles, it is the promise of their return home. But it is not only the promise of what God will do—it is spoken in the imperative, indicating what God's people must do.

"In the desert, **prepare** the way! **Make** a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain need be made low, the uneven ground made level and the great rocky expanses be made into a plain. And God's glory will be revealed." (Isaiah 40:3-5) I want to challenge you to see this passage as I have begun to see it, as an imperative for us to rise to do the impossible. ...

But I also have renewed faith. My faith has been renewed by the richness of churches in the Middle East, Latin America and Asia that are giving in faith far more than it seems possible. My faith is renewed by having the opportunity to share with so many people different from me. The richness of the tapestry that God has given us in the human family is amazing and a source of new life and hope for those who will embrace it. This is where I choose to start.

For dreamers and immigrants, for refugees and displaced persons, the way home seems out of reach. The barriers are mounting and the chasms are deep. But we are many, and I know that we can find ways together to prepare the way home. There are bridges we can build here in the U.S., just as I have seen communities of faith moving mountains to serve the strangers who have come to their communities.

One of the greatest transformative initiatives I have seen so far is a program called Bread and Salt, sponsored by the Arab Baptist Seminary in Lebanon. It provides dozens of youth from a wide variety of faith backgrounds the opportunity to get to know the people that they have heard so much about, and probably have learned to hate. It includes orthodox, evangelicals, Catholics, Sunni, Shia, Druze and Jews. They spend a lot of time together over several months sharing a meal and conversation each week, hosted in each other's homes and in each of their traditions. Once you have shared bread and salt, it is said, you are committed to one another's well-being and friendship. The idea is to break down barriers and forge new relationships that challenge our fears and teach us a greater truth about each other.

I am looking for opportunities to do this in my community, intentionally reaching beyond my comfort zones and relating to people and communities of faith that will further enrich my life and understanding. In the midst of my travel schedule, I am trying to forge the

connections to make a group like this possible. I would love to share this idea and encourage you to do such things in your communities and congregations.