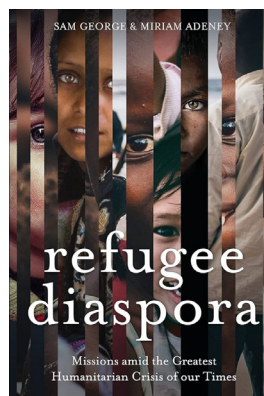


Refugee Diaspora: Missions Amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crisis of the World

By Sam George and Miriam Adeney.
William Carey Library. 2018. 208 pages.

Reviewed by Eileen Perry

Eileen Perry (pseudonym) served with her husband and children for 11 years in a creative-access country. Due to their children's needs, the family moved to Europe to work with refugees nine years ago. Now she enjoys the freedom of being able to share with, learn from, and partner in the spiritual arena more openly. She primarily serves in the area of leader development and multiplication through training initiatives and long-term mentoring.



Until refugees reach their final destination, ministry among them often feels like a revolving door. As transitory as it may be, the gateway cities where they are “stuck” for several years (with limited access to the job market) have proven strategic for frontier church planting. One factor is the exorbitant amount of time available to be in the Word or exploring spiritual change. Refugees who come to faith can become pastors and ministry leaders influencing the emerging church among their people group internationally and back in their home countries. People arrive vulnerable and desperate for basic needs, and they can experience the love of Christ through the international body of believers. Journeying with refugees requires a holistic approach addressing the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of these vulnerable people who chose to risk all (for a variety of reasons) and leave their known communities. God

meets them in this vulnerable place away from their cultures, families, and the “group think.” However, ministry to refugees in their destination country looks different than ministry to the same people in their home countries.

Sam George and Miriam Adeney do an excellent job in their book of providing a broad and thorough perspective of ministry to refugees. Each chapter is written from a different angle by refugee writers, both males and females, and multicultural workers. The book is divided into three sections: Regions, Responses, and Reflections. This book could be used as a guide for those who are seeking to serve amidst the global refugee community or as a training manual for churches. This review highlights the contributors’ practical advice and observations which appear to be consistent across the regions. For those serving in countries from which refugees are leaving, this resource could serve as inspiration to connect with trained leaders in diaspora who have had the freedom to study more deeply without the burden of security fears. This resource could also be an encouragement to overseas church planters regarding how God is using the refugee journey to bring many to himself. It may also be helpful for workers in more volatile countries to explore options for possible refugee work in the future should they suddenly need to leave but desire to continue to steward their years of language and culture skills.

Part 1: “Regions”

Most chapters highlight similar effective ministry philosophies to best connect with refugees. After initial urgent humanitarian needs are met like clothing, food, and housing, the development needs of refugees (i.e., “survival resources”) must be addressed. Ministries and churches identified language instruction as a primary need, which creates opportunity for relationship building and church partnership. Some churches have a program where church members adopt refugee families for a set period of time to help create community during their transition (125-126). As refugees often come from community-based

cultures, these relationships are essential to their transition, assisting them in the integration process into their host culture. It also opens their hearts as they see Christ's love in action. Acts of service should not be underestimated, as so many refugees in Europe talk about the contrast they experienced between their own religion and the people in their host country being willing to serve them through menial tasks.

Several of the authors note the refreshment and revitalization that refugees bring to a church: "Christians receive a fresh experience of their faith ... receiving much more spiritually from refugees in return for their material gifts and practice of hospitality" (76). Many times, refugees help Westerners see Scripture from a new angle. The experience and worldview of the refugees, which are often closer to the original cultural context, can add a depth and breadth to their understanding of the Bible.

As refugees adjust to their new cultures, there are a variety of ways for refugees to begin to pursue sustainability. Wu shares about her experience and observations in Jordan. She saw some groups set up microbusinesses for refugees to produce and sell handmade items and food products, commending this model for how it allows them to sustain themselves and "cultivate life skills" (83). However, she warns that many times she saw a repeated pattern of well-intentioned foreigners wanting to assist a program and providing support, which can lead to the local pastor struggling with the increase in available funds due to a lack of experience with financial management and oversight (89). She suggests partnering with honorable accountability. It is important to teach the emerging refugee leaders how to have mutual transparency on a team. I have observed two church leadership teams with a foreign partnership model this beautifully. The foreigners serve as advisors and mentors, yet the refugee leaders also share in the decision-making process. This creates a system of financial transparency and a learner's posture.

Two contributors discuss how refugees, after their transition and resettlement, might engage in ministry. Some refugees, after coming to faith and being discipled, return to their home countries to minister and

start new churches (101). In our context, the refugees we work with have a vision to return to their countries as workers but have chosen to be very public online with biblical content, and thus they realize they will be at risk if they return. Thus, an alternative option for them is to enter into ministry here in Europe. Krua challenges the church to view the refugees as peers and close the financial gap or to find support solutions for the refugees to become full-time ministry workers:

The missionary funding model makes it difficult for refugees and immigrants—who don't have the financial support networks of white evangelical Christians—to participate functionally in ministry to refugees. Such institutional systems need to be totally overhauled and replaced with more just and inclusive structures. (140)

In Europe, many of the mature refugees are now at the stage of desiring to enter full-time ministry. I would contend that our role as Westerners at this point is to mentor and encourage them in fundraising and every other aspect of the process. This approach contrasts with the strategy we would have in the refugees' home country. However, it allows the refugee to focus on the ministries God has placed on their hearts and to reach their own people better than many Westerners could.

Part 2: "Responses"

Across all regions, workers identified that trauma care is essential for the overall well-being of the refugee who has fled war and abuse. We often hear refugees complain they cannot concentrate on language learning because of all the stress and trauma of their pasts. Some are constantly at the hospital for the physical manifestation of this stress. In the last few years, God has touched many lives through several ministries which created trainings in basic trauma care, combined with applicable scriptural stories. A ministry in Germany, highlighted in one of the chapters, is training their partner churches in how to provide trauma

counseling (160), and addressing issues like racial reconciliation and forgiveness (182).

It is common to see cross-cultural workers experience burnout or compassion fatigue. Dr. Melki warns, "If we confuse compassion and care, we begin to believe compassion requires personal attention to all aspects of life for those we serve, rather than targeted intervention in moments of greatest need. Then we expect deep engagement with hundreds of people and become frustrated at the unsustainable nature of such an expectation" (192). It is important for refugee ministry workers prior to arrival to develop their theology of suffering and to have a clear understanding that they are not the refugees' saviors but rather advocates who are seeking to help them stand on their own two feet.

In the West, it is sometimes considered politically incorrect to share the gospel with others. One contributor shared beautifully how they respectfully keep the gospel at the core of their ministry in their outreach centers, called "The Meeting Place" (TMP): "TMP does not espouse aggressive or manipulative methods. Rather, the gospel is shared "with integrity" and "within the context of relationship and with no conditionality" (166-175). In addition to sharing the gospel with compassion, all the TMP staff have experience in the countries and cultures represented by their refugee participants, seeing many have come to faith through their outreaches and partnerships with local churches. They also note a common issue we all see and wrestle with in Europe, that some asylum seekers use baptism certificates and coming to faith as a strategic move for the acceptance of their cases. To deter this, many churches created rigorous six-month long baptism preparation classes to assess if the individual was serious about their faith (170). Due to the extremely transitory nature of the refugees in non-destination countries, one may want to move faster in sharing about Jesus. A common practice in other settings is a methodical, chronological approach culminating with Jesus. When I first transitioned to working with refugees, a seasoned worker exhorted me to always share about Jesus, whatever the lesson might be.

At first, I shirked at her advice, thinking that I could slowly build towards that, but in time I came to see the wisdom in what she told me to do and now make sure to always bring the lessons back to Jesus.

The threats are real for Muslims who embrace Jesus as their savior. With so many receiving asylum in Europe for their faith, there is a tension in discerning how to journey with them amidst the dangers. The theological foundations are broad for a policy to encourage Christians to remain in their countries whenever possible. Carter highlights scriptural examples that we can look to in these situations. To flee persecution can certainly be a valid, biblical response to danger (Acts 9:23–25). But it can be equally valid to endure persecution with joy, counting it a privilege (Acts 5:41; 2 Tim 3:10–13; Jas 1:2), or to resist unjust treatment by claiming citizenship rights (Acts 22:25–29) (201). Carter suggests an alternative to encouraging people to relocate to a far-off region, which is to find an in-country (or nearby) location for the one at risk and to partner with others to support this transition and settlement process (203–206). This could be done in partnership with other ministries to create unity and to show the body of Christ in action.

When I first began serving with refugees, I was surprised at how many had smartphones. I often work with illiterate women, and while they may not know how to read and write, they certainly know how to use their phones to some extent. Many ministries observed this situation and created multiple teaching apps, Bible study materials, and audio Bibles in the refugees' target languages. Sam George highlights the humanitarian ways that tech has also helped. The Red Cross created a "Find the Face" initiative to help with lost refugees. He also highlights organizations that teach coding skills for refugees so they have more access to employment opportunities (220). All these initiatives assist the refugees in their transition process.

The following quote encompasses refugee ministry. It could become the vision statement and source of inspiration for churches and individuals who are led to step out in this strategic ministry:

The true meaning of biblical hospitality is at the heart of welcoming strangers. The journey of weaving a love of strangers into the very tapestry of daily life will not happen overnight. Learning the art of biblical hospitality is a lifelong discipleship matter. It takes a great deal of intentionality, a growing awareness of changes in our immediate surroundings and in the world, and a continual development of intercultural skills. But most of all it requires a longing to reflect God's heart for the marginalized in our world as we navigate the difficult terrain of Christian hospitality in an inhospitable world. (235)

Part 3: "Reflections"

The final section of the book wraps up the first two sections with the biblical, theological and missiological support for ministering to refugees. It includes a substantive, wonderful study on the biblical basis for refugee ministry and the scriptural examples for how we can serve in this capacity. It was only once I started to serve amidst refugees that I truly began to appreciate that Jesus himself was a refugee fleeing with his family for his life as a young child (Matt. 2:13-15). This shared experience with God himself gives those who serve refugees and the refugees themselves such a connection and validation for this much needed ministry.

Recommendation

This book is an easy read. Although several contributors are from academic backgrounds, they kept the material accessible for all educational levels. For one who is curious about refugee ministry, its strategy, and its impact, it is a thorough overview. I would not recommend this book for a seasoned refugee worker, as the principles are not novel; it is more like, "Ministry to Refugees 101." For those serving in closed countries, it could be a resource to consider on how

to increasingly integrate strong refugee believers into their ministries, because they likely are already engaged in ministry. God is sending refugees to open countries, and they are not only reaching fellow refugees; they are bringing new life to dying churches and reaching many people in their host country.

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Recommended Reading

Refugee Highway Partnership

Global Diaspora Network