

The International Refugee Opportunity: A World Witness and ONA Joint Response Proposal.

(ONA has approved the following proposal. WW board is asked to review proposal for approval.)

Since World War II, there has not been a humanitarian crisis to rival what we now face in light of the Syrian civil war which has displaced 12 million people. Conservatively, 200,000 civilians have been killed in this crisis to date. 3,000 migrants alone have died seeking safety in Europe (as of the writing of this document, 24 died just yesterday). Like in World War II, history will judge the church for its action or inaction. It should be acknowledged that this refugee crisis is not isolated to Syria as there are 59,000,000 refugees worldwide.

There are times in the history of our denomination when the mission of the Church and her agencies intersect in such a way as to realize close cooperation of mission, proximity and opportunity. The refugee crisis is one of those times as people from around the world seek asylum in the United States. Therefore, we, the executive directors of World Witness and Outreach North America submit to you, our boards of directors, the following request for joint ministry in the USA to meet the needs of these disenfranchised people as they arrive in our neighborhoods.

World Witness has long been our voice to the nations with over a hundred years of Gospel ministry throughout the world. The ARPC has made considerable and noble investment into world mission and the Lord has blessed our efforts with great and impactful ministry. For most of these years, however, our mission has been abroad - sending resources and missionaries to the nations.

Outreach North America is our Synod's response to the great need for the Gospel in our neighborhoods in North America. Through Evangelism, Church vitality and new church development, ONA is equipping ARP Churches and individuals to reach their neighbors. God's great providence and plan has brought the nations served by World Witness to the neighborhoods served by ONA.

For the Boards to consider:

In response to the opportunity to "*love the nations and the neighborhoods,*" the Boards of Directors of World Witness and ONA submit the following joint response and plan of action to the Synod to address and engage the refugees that have been granted asylum in the U.S. through sanctioned government resettlement programs, working in cooperation with official refugee Christian NGOs such as World Relief.

We recognize that immigration is a sensitive topic for many of our members and congregations. Therefore, we urge much prayer as we proceed. We would pray specifically that the Lord will

enable us to see each person – whatever their country of origin or immigration status – primarily as one who is made in the image of God. We recognize that Christian liberty allows us, as ARP Christians, to hold differing view points as to our government’s role in this crisis; however we pray that partisan discourse would not in any way blind us to this remarkable opportunity for the refugees already among us or yet to come.

Many of the Scripture’s most prominent figures were immigrants or refugees (e.g., Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, etc.). Their local authorities often viewed these spiritual heroes with skepticism and distrust; however, the Lord used each of them to accomplish God’s salvific purposes. We believe He is bringing those who don’t yet know Him to a place where they are able to learn more of Him. Ultimately, these people may spread the Gospel back to their own people. World Witness has recently collected a number of stories where just this type of thing has happened.

Is it possible that God is using immigration to the US to accomplish His purposes? To preach peace to those who are far and those who are near? (Eph 2:17) We must position ourselves to choose faith over fear and to respond positively and with Godly enthusiasm to the call of Jesus who said “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

The Synod agencies of World Witness and Outreach North America of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, recognizing the sovereign hand of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whom all things are joined together (Col.1), join with Him in ministry to those political refugees who find themselves within the (our) communities (or that have an ARP presence).

It will be the joint privilege of these agencies to coordinate efforts within the ARP denomination to:

- 1) Present to the Synod on June 16 an update of worldwide work with the refugees for the purpose of giving examples of current ministry to the refugees and provide encouragement of effective work already being done by the ARPC abroad.
- 2) Propose a position paper formulated by the board members of these agencies to present to the Synod that outlines the Theological underpinnings of this mercy ministry and present our strategic response.
- 3) Educate the ARP Churches on the domestic and international refugee crisis
- 4) Provide resources to facilitate local refugee ministry