There is certainly much in the news and public discussion about the 21.3 million refugees here, near and far. Along with heated conversation is much misunderstanding about the vetting process and the lumping of refugees together with other types of immigrants including asylum seekers, foreign workers and undocumented immigrants.

Despite this confusion and the White House reducing the number of refugees who can come to the U.S. in 2017 to 50,000 (or one refugee for every 7,000 U.S. residents), Arrive Ministries and our church partners are boldly moving forward to serve refugees who are being resettled in Minnesota, as well as those who are already here and desire friendship and support as they navigate their new lives.

Arrive Ministries has over 40 new churches who have stepped forward in the past several months to fulfil our biblical mandate to “welcome the stranger” and to care for the vulnerable.

Thank you for joining us in this important work.

Bob Oehrig
Executive Director

“We are happy to have such a strong partner in Arrive Ministries for such important work.”
- Kristine Bjerkaas Friesen, Department of Human Services, State of MN

“I love this country. Freedom, security, a job and a future for my children. This is what makes America Great.”
- As told to Bob Oehrig by an Iraqi refugee

“Thank you for the wonderful and faithful work of Arrive. To us it seems that the work you do is truly where it’s at in living as servants in Jesus’ kingdom.”
- Tia & Vusal Hasanov

“As far as Christians are concerned — and particularly evangelical Christians in America — there’s fear. Some people are just afraid, and fear is shaping what their attitude is towards refugees as well as their interpretation of Scripture.”
- Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Continuing to partner with World Relief to transform lives

arriveministries.org
Long Journeys to Freedom

Gratitude for Opportunities in the U.S.
One individual who recently made an impact on our staff is an Ethiopian woman who was applying for citizenship. While completing her application, she shared her version of the American Dream:

She was granted political asylum in 1992 and worked two full time jobs, sometimes sleeping only two hours each night, so that she could send money to her children to ensure they attended good schools in Ethiopia. She proudly explained that now her children are all successful in their work – one is a business consultant in Washington DC; another is a consultant in Ethiopia for an international company, and the third is a fashion merchandiser in Australia. She said, “After I was granted asylum, I felt that the US has given me such a gift so I chose to never receive a penny from the US government. I had to work really hard, and now, I am about to buy my first home. This country changed my life. I am so thankful to God, first, and to the United States, second, for giving me the opportunities to provide for myself and to provide for my children.”

A Blind Somali Man Sees God’s provision through Arrive Ministries’ SALT volunteers
The first time we met with Abdirahman he became quite enthusiastic that somebody knew Braille and could talk with him about it. We met him again a few days later and began Brailleing a list of first Somali, then English equivalent words of everyday objects like door, table, tea, sink, chair, etc.

Abdirahman was out of Braille paper so another Arrive volunteer picked him up a ream and delivered it the next day. Then we completed an application for him for the National Library Service Talking Books program which included plenty of Braille books at the introductory level.

We also made a call to the State Services for the Blind to see about getting him a mobility cane. One volunteer is a certified Orientation and Mobility instructor and has begun providing him basic lessons. Much yet to do and looking forward to it.

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We really appreciate the several hundred weekly Somali Adult Literacy Training (SALT) volunteers and the many who go the extra mile to love and serve our Somali neighbors in the name of Jesus.

Blessed to be a New Neighbor
“I have deeply appreciated the connection with Arrive Ministries over the past two years as a New Neighbor. I am so blessed by the long-lasting relationship I’ve had with the Karen family in St Paul. We have learned so much about the beauty of cross-cultural relationships and the value of serving our refugee neighbors. Arrive Ministries truly embodies the heart of Christ for the nations in its work, and I am honored to be a small part of it. I look forward to staying connected with Arrive Ministries in the future and seeing how the organization grows.”

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Rebekah Jacobson

A Story of Resilience
Recently one of our staff was talking with a refugee woman who crossed the Mediterranean Sea eight years ago from Libya to Malta, pregnant with one child and carrying five additional children. She said that out of 10 boats making the crossing, eight began to sink. She was terrified that they wouldn’t make it. She was incredibly relieved when they finally reached the shores of Malta.

As she shared her story with us, we were struck by how dangerous and horrific life has been for this woman to be willing to take that risk, and what a courageous and strong woman she was to take that journey.

We have much to learn from the resilience of “our” refugee families and new friends. We cannot imagine what it would be like to be in her shoes. It is such a blessing to be able to welcome resilient people like this woman and her children.

Thank you for helping us to help them to write a happy ending to a long journey to freedom.

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Jessica Wills

Bikes for Kidz
Twenty-three refugee children, with the help of their Arrive Ministries’ New Neighbors and Church Teams, received bikes and brand new helmets.

We are grateful for Free Bikes 4 Kidz, a nonprofit organization geared toward providing bikes to children in our cities, who provided these wonderful gifts to our New Neighbor, Sharon Cords, who spearheaded this opportunity after finding out about the program.

Not only did Sharon help provide bikes for the three children in the Karen refugee family she has befriended, but for 20 additional refugee children helped by Arrive Ministries teams. Over 5,000 Twin Cities children have received bikes through this wonderful program!

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Lynn Shimkus
“I want to help change their story … from that of being a refugee to a friend.”

My first visit was for the purpose of introducing myself and establishing what would hopefully be an ongoing relationship. One doesn’t know what to expect in a situation like this, yet I had a real sense of anticipation. After being welcomed, we all sat down in the living room and began introductions. Conversation progressed somewhat awkwardly, which wasn’t surprising given the noticeable language barrier. But as time went on, and as they became more willing to share, I found that I was quickly drawn into their stories. In a situation like this, listening often does you far better than speaking. Surprisingly, for being our first meeting, they shared much, as if they had been waiting for someone to come and hear their stories of loss and hardship, as well as their aspirations for peace and stability.

We sat there chatting away for over two hours, trying to figure out the complexities and absurdities of American society; laughing about the challenges of ordering food for the first time at a McDonalds, conversing over present global issues, and remembering the sobering dilemma faced by real people, their friends, who still remain in the refugee camp.

At all times, there seemed to be up to five different unfinished conversations being picked up, as one would unapologetically change the subject, only to see the other shift it back again to what it was before. This cycle went on without ever upsetting either of them, since it is simply the way, I assumed, they converse as Somalis. And all the while, as this unintentional battle to hold the reigns of the conversation played out, I was shown pictures of life back in the Dadaab camp. I was quite content to indefinitely sit back and let them educate me.

Just as I was about to leave, the brothers commenced to make some potent and extremely sweet tea. Because of this, and without complaint, I ended up sitting tight for another hour or so. They had pulled back the curtains which gave us a wonderful view of the distant downtown skyline lit up with the setting of the sun. Sitting there with those men while looking out at buildings that house such a multitude of people, I was greatly affected by what I was experiencing and learning.

Their problems became my own

There is so much happening beyond our borders that we fail to acknowledge, partly because there is a great deal already here that demands attention, but also because we tend to be, quite frankly, uninterested. After all, aren’t the problems of another people theirs, and theirs alone? Yet, here I was sitting with two men whose problems, had become my own. People who grew up in the precarious world of a refugee camp, a predicament that few of us can comprehend, are now living in “my” community.

Let us become people who are interested, and more than that — people who have resolved to do what we can to love and help change their story and designation from that of being a refugee to a friend and co-citizens of our great city and nation.

I left apartment 203 not knowing precisely how I’d be able to help these two brothers, or what my continued involvement in their lives might look like. But I knew that they had already worked to alter my perspective, and sparked within me a stronger desire to ask God to use me to communicate the truth and hope of the Gospel — something that He is most certainly willing to do.
A Father’s Love Crosses Borders

By Kate Shermer

Young women and young men can fall in love no matter the circumstances. Htoo Htoo, a young Karen refugee woman fell in love with Nickorn, a Thai citizen, when she was displaced in Thailand.

Htoo Htoo was working for equal rights for Karen women living in Burma and Thailand. Nickorn was working as an interpreter for those doing U.S. refugee interviews in Thailand.

One year into their relationship Htoo Htoo moved away from Nickorn to a Thai refugee camp. But Nickorn followed his heart, and soon came to live with Htoo Htoo and her family.

A few months later Htoo Htoo found out they were expecting a child together. With her parent’s approval, they planned a small wedding to celebrate with friends and family. At the end of 2010, Htoo Htoo and Nickorn welcomed their son into their first home in a Thai refugee camp.

Two years later, the time came for Htoo Htoo and their son to be resettled in America. Nickorn had to stay in Thailand, until he could qualify as Htoo Htoo’s husband to come to America. Even though Htoo Htoo and Nickorn are both ethnically Karen; as a Thai citizen, Nickorn was unable to register as a refugee in the camp.

Resettling in America

Htoo Htoo and her son were resettled to the Twin Cities in 2013, and with the help of Arrive Ministries’ Immigration Counselor Amber Kerrigan, she filed a petition for Nickorn to join her in Minnesota.

While Htoo Htoo and Nickorn were apart for three years, Nickorn missed watching his son grow from a curious toddler to an energetic kindergartner. The father FaceTimed with his son and wife multiple times a week, so their relationships developed over the years, but it wasn’t enough to stop the ache of a young boy for the arms of his daddy.

“He really loves his father. He always talks about his father, and on the phone asks him ‘Why are you not coming (to America)? What are you doing there (in Thailand)?’ He’s really excited to see his father now,” said Htoo Htoo.

Nervous and Excited

Two earlier plans for Nickorn’s arrival were cancelled due to processing delays, so both Htoo Htoo and her son were suspicious that this arrival wouldn’t happen. “They always cancel our flights, even now I am not sure he will arrive here or not,” said Htoo Htoo. But when Nickorn’s flight landed at the Minneapolis/ St. Paul airport, and his luggage showed up circling the baggage carousel, anticipation mounted for Htoo Htoo and her son.

No Longer Separated

Finally, a dad long separated from his growing boy, was able to pick his son up and plant a kiss on him, and hug his wife who devotedly waited for him. As Nickorn took a moment to glance at his now 5-year-old son, he proclaimed, “He’s very cute. I really love both of them.”

The family of three gathered their things and left for home, hand-in-hand. A boy, who for too long had no memories of the touch of his father, was clinging tightly to both mom and dad, ready for their future as a reunified family.

“Refugee family reunification cases are definitely the highlight of my job, because all of the administrative work that I do, means that a dad who hasn’t seen his son for years can hold him again. That’s incredible.” — Amber Kerrigan

Arrive Ministries is an affiliate of Transform Minnesota, an evangelical network of churches from across the state. For information about Arrive Ministries and the important work we do in Minnesota, visit amvministries.org or contact us: info@arriveministries.org, 612.798.4332.
REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT FACTS

Refugee: A person forced to flee their home country to escape persecution, war, or violence.

Resettlement: The careful selection by governments such as the U.S. – for purposes of lawful admission – of vulnerable refugees who can neither return to their home country nor live in safety in neighboring countries.

HOW DO REFUGEES GET RESETTLED?

- During standard registration interviews UNHCR flags vulnerable cases for possible resettlement. Refugees cannot apply for resettlement.
- UNHCR refers only the most vulnerable cases to host countries for possible resettlement. Refugees cannot pick their country of resettlement.
- Only recognized refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health, or other fundamental rights are at risk in the host country are considered for resettlement.
- Persons found to have committed serious crimes or who might pose a threat to others would not be referred for resettlement in another country.

Vulnerability categories include:
- Women & Girls at Risk
- Survivors of Violence and/or Torture
- Family Reunification
- Medical Needs
- Children at Risk

GLOBAL RESETTLEMENT BY THE NUMBERS:

Less than 1% of the world’s refugees are ever resettled.
More than 30 countries around the world currently accept refugees for resettlement.
140,000 refugee resettlement spaces were made available by those governments in 2016.
8% of the global refugee population is in need of resettlement.

RESETTLEMENT TO THE UNITED STATES

The United States has an exceptional history of welcoming refugees and is the top resettlement country in the world. Since 1975, the U.S. government has welcomed over 3 million refugees for resettlement from all over the world, and these refugees have built new lives and homes in all 50 states.

UNHCR screens and interviews each resettlement candidate. The United States then conducts its own vetting process and the U.S. alone decides whether to accept a refugee for resettlement. The entire process is conducted abroad, can take up to 2 years, and involves:

- 8 U.S. Federal Government Agencies
- 6 Different security databases
- 5 Separate background checks
- 4 Biometric checks
- 3 Separate in-person interviews
- 2 Inter-agency security checks

After the U.S. government approves refugees for resettlement, each case is assigned to one of nine NGOs (six of which are faith-based) by the U.S. Department of State. That NGO helps them find work, integrate into their new communities, and adjust to life in the United States.

UNHCR refers a vulnerable refugee for resettlement.

The U.S. government screens the refugee and determines whether it would like to admit them for resettlement.

The State Department assigns the case to one of 9 agencies:
- Church World Service
- Episcopal Migration Ministries
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services
- International Rescue Committee
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- World Relief Corporation
- HIAS
- African Immigrants Development Council

REGION OF ORIGIN FOR REFUGEES RESETTLED TO THE UNITED STATES IN FISCAL YEAR 2016

- Asia: 37%
- Europe: 4%
- Africa: 42%
- Near East & South Asia: 15%
- Latin America & Caribbean: 15%

84,995 refugees resettled to the U.S. in FY 2016

TOP STATES FOR RESETTLEMENT IN FISCAL YEAR 2016

1. California
2. Texas
3. Michigan
4. Washington
5. New York
6. Arizona
7. Illinois
8. Virginia
9. Nebraska
10. Tennessee

“Just a little note to say what a pleasure it is to be a small part of your ministry. I’ve been following the Arrive Ministries’ Facebook page and seen the recent postings and press releases surrounding the refugee ban and I’m so encouraged by your willingness to stand up for those who can’t always stand up for themselves. I’ve also seen several negative comments on your page and I want to respond by encouraging you that there are many of us who are applauding the way that you are fearlessly living out Isaiah 58:6-12. May God make Arrive Ministries’ light break forth like the dawn.”

- Rebecca Lehmer
A Prophetic Call to Welcome the Refugee

In March, 250 pastors and Christian workers came together for the "Standing with Refugees Event" under the auspice of Arrive Ministries and Transform MN as they sought to better understand the church's call to love the "stranger" in our midst.

Pastor John Crosby (Christ Presbyterian Church, Edina); Patricia Fenrick (Department of Human Services, Refugee Program Office); Bob Oehrig (Arrive Ministries); and John Pierre Gatera (recently resettled refugee) shared about Gospel witness motivated by both a clear Biblical perspective and credible information in this era of polarization and fear.

Pastor Crosby told the roomful of people gathered at Calvary Church Roseville that God's people have always been called to treat immigrants and refugees with love and dignity just as the people of Israel wished they had been treated when they were foreigners in Egypt.

He reminded those assembled of the Hebrew word GER that is a central theme to the message of the prophets. It means sojourner, a newcomer lacking inherited rights, a foreigner. The Old Testament commands that are associated with this threeletter word are powerful and have many modern-day applications. Pastor Crosby went on to say that biblical teachings always demands that God's people protect the most vulnerable people in their society, the GER.

Also at the Standing with Refugees event, Patricia Fenrick, Refugee Workforce Development and Outreach Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Human Services, spoke about the refugee security process. She said that as we seek to understand how Christians are called to welcome the alien in our midst, "be confident in our country's screening process, knowing that refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of anybody who travels to the United States; a process that takes a minimum of 18-24 months and involves six different federal agencies."

Bob Oehrig, Executive Director of Arrive Ministries, went on to provide information on the specific refugee populations in Minnesota. He shared stories of churches serving refugees with compassion and a warm welcome, and accounts of refugees moving beyond trauma and persecution.

Oehrig reminded those assembled to put our confidence in God, not national structures or policies; to always remember our ancestors who too were once foreigners; and to never forget to show hospitality (literally love for the stranger — philoxenia — in the original Greek) as God gives us the privilege to do mission on our own doorsteps.