

MINUTE FOR MISSION

Peace & Global Witness Gifts Multiply Efforts to Welcome Refugees

Like millions of people around the world, Presbyterian elder Bill Campbell was moved by the heartbreaking image of a drowned Syrian boy whose body washed up on a Turkish beach in 2015. The photo of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi drew international attention to the danger and desperation faced by people fleeing the civil war in Syria. Aylan was among thousands of Syrians who drowned trying to escape the violence gripping their country.

“There must be a way I can do something,” Bill told himself. As chair of the mission committee at Old First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, Bill got his congregation involved by working with a local refugee resettlement agency to collect and assemble “welcome kits” that newly arrived refugee families find in their new homes when they first open the door. The kits include household goods such as flatware, dishes, cooking utensils, lamps, cleaning supplies, toiletries, and linens. It took two cars to haul one kit, and the congregation assembled and delivered seven of them. Moved by the needs of anxious children still in refugee camps, the congregation also helped send 5,000 teddy bears to traumatized refugee children in Jordan.

But Bill hoped the wider church could multiply the efforts of congregations like his. He and like-minded members of other churches asked San Francisco Presbytery to match their congregations’ contributions to support resettlement of refugees in the San Francisco Bay Area. The presbytery agreed to match up to \$10,000 from its peacemaking fund. The matching funds were available thanks to gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. A goal was set and a nine-month time frame established.

“Congregations really jumped at the chance,” Bill says. “The opportunity was presented at a time when most congregations were involved in their annual pledge campaigns, and budgets were already set. Yet congregations found a way to participate. In just four months, we blew past the goal.”

More than \$20,000 was given to help impoverished, war-battered families find safety, welcome, and a new life. Compassionate Presbyterians have refused to stand by idly while the world faces the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Their generous gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering provided the seed money that stirred even more generosity through the presbytery’s matching gift offer. At the same time, gifts to the Offering were also ensuring that the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN could continue its work on behalf of refugees.

The Peace & Global Witness Offering equips the PC(USA) to proclaim Christ’s peace. Twenty five percent of the Offering is retained by congregations for local ministries of peace and witness, another 25% supports these ministries at the mid council level, and the remaining 50% supports the peacemaking and reconciliation ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Bill says extending welcome to refugees helps the United States live up to its highest ideals. More importantly, he notes, it fulfills a Christian imperative. “The Old Testament tells us to welcome the foreigner and the refugee,” Bill explains. “Jesus told us in Matthew that ‘what you do for the least of these you do to me.’ It is part of our calling as Christians to help when we can.”

Giving to the Peace & Global Witness Offering is one way you can follow in the way of Jesus. Your gifts express your commitment to a more just and peaceful world.

Let Us Pray

Compassionate God, we pray for people who seek a safe place to call home. Help us to extend your hospitality to those who have fled danger and who are striving to begin a new life among us. Grant us the strength and wisdom to choose welcome. **Amen.**