

God is My Refuge: Seeking Refuge Then and Now

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 May 2015

Preacher: Shelagh Westberg

[0 : 0 0] Well, welcome to Learner's Exchange, and thanks for coming. I think you're going to enjoy what you hear today, particularly from Lauren Belisky, who is not just an executive director.

I mean, what kind of an image comes up in your head when you hear that word? He also lives in the same house as the refugees and is raising his kids with theirs.

Now, that's a different kind of ministry, and I think we have a wonderful opportunity here to hear more about that today. You know, refugees, well, the UN says that 25 million would be a conservative count of the number of people who are refugees in the world today.

That is about two-thirds of the population of this country. And that does not include people who are refugees within their own countries.

These are the people who have crossed boundaries to get to a place of safety. But when you look at Colombia, where there really is a civil war going on with the FARC, and at Syria, where Syrians are moving all over their own country to try and seek safety, as well as going to nearby countries.

[1 : 1 4] It's an enormous problem. It's almost too overwhelming for us to grasp. But I think it's even harder for us to relate without that sense of hopelessness about, oh my gosh, what could I do about such a huge problem?

How could I relate to it in any way? Well, today's topic is going to, I hope, bring us a little closer to understanding some of the ways in which we can relate to people when they come for refuge to our country.

Now, the news network, you know, I can hardly stand to look at it night after night. And if it isn't war, it's mountains coming apart. You know, it's just so hard to watch that without sort of thanking God that it's happening somewhere else and not here.

But I have a concern that this daily recital of detail is inuring us to the real tragedy in people's lives that forces them to take to the road or the boat.

There is a tendency to normalize that. We wake up, look at the broadcast, say, not exactly ho-hum, more refugees in another part of the world, but it's just the initial impact of some of these announcements has lost its punch.

[2 : 3 3] And I am determined today that you will not go home thinking that way. So we're going to try and put a more human face on the refugee experience. First, this is the way it will go.

I will remind you of the refugee experience of a couple of God's people from the Bible. We will then take a little break to rearrange things at the front here. Two minutes, refill your coffee cups, whatever.

Actually, Lauren hasn't had any coffee yet. And then we'll settle down to look at a Christian response to this problem in our own city.

So we'll begin with a collection of words from the Bible. And if you haven't got a sheet like this, there are some at the front here. Has everybody got one they can look at?

Okay. Well, this is a collection of words from one of the Bible's more famous refugees, King David.

- [3 : 44] Please try to think, as we read these lines alternately, of people on rafts bouncing around the Mediterranean, trying to get to Lampedusa and hoping that they don't spring a leak.
- Or the Christian girls yanked out of a school in North Africa to face an uncertain future at the hands of terrorists. Or a Syrian family walking toward the Turkish border, hoping that it will be open today and that they will be able to cross.
- Or the Mexican man seeking refuge from the drug lords in Sinaloa, who is trying to get across the Canadian border from the United States, which he walked through.
- This is a real person I'm talking about. That is hard to do. To get from the United States to Canada is virtually impossible if you are a refugee. So I'll begin.
- God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.
- [4 : 59] Your turn. O God, save me and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer and give ear to the words of my mouth.
- For strangers have risen against me. And the ruthless men will save my life. Deliver me from my enemies, O my God. Protect me from those who rise up against me.
- Deliver me from those who work evil. And save me from bloodthirsty men. For behold, they lie in wait for my life. And fierce men stir up strife against me.
- Every evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. Hear my cry, O God. And listen to my breath.
- From the ends of the earth I call to you. And I am a saint. For you have been my refuge. Make haste, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me.
- [5 : 56] Put to shame and confusion those who seek my life. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked. From the grasp of unjust and cruel men.
- Be to me and the proper refuge. I cry to you, O Lord. Attend to my cry. For I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors.
- For they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison that I may give thanks to your name. For the enemy has pursued my soul and crushed my life to the ground.
- He has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. And my spirit faints within me. Thank you. More of David later.
- But I want to start with an earlier example of one whose life was in danger. And I'm speaking here about Cain. We don't often think of him as a refugee. Because we hear more about him when he is not a refugee in his life before.
- [6 : 57] But he had to leave his country not because of what others had done. But because of what he had done. God's punishment for murdering his brother was to send Cain to exile.
- And Cain was terrified. He was going from a land of safety to a land of perceived danger. Where he said, They will kill me. Now, we aren't told who they are.
- But clearly he knew enough about how he would be treated as a murderer in another land. God did protect him. And he actually made out pretty well.
- He went to the land of Nod. And he built a city. Some of you would remember a long time ago when we had an architect speak to this group. And he referred to Cain as the first architect.
- And that was the verse he used. The verse about building a city. A word about exile. Because it comes up all over in the Bible. There have been many times in history when exile was a common punishment for criminals.

[7 : 59] Particularly for murder and treason. The criminal was escorted to the border by people who made sure that he was going to leave. And he understood that if he ever returned to the country, the death penalty would be carried out.

But more recently, we have examples of deposed leaders of countries. Like monarchs of European countries. The only one that's left on the Mediterranean is Spain.

And he was out for a while too. But so there are. Oh, and the Duvaliers, two of them. Former presidents of Haiti who were expelled from that country.

And they have to find their own place of safety in those situations. They can hardly be called refugees when they have a lot of resources at their disposal.

Then there are others who choose exile because going home would be worse. And the man that blew all those secrets on the internet, secrets of the American government, had difficulty finding refuge somewhere else.

[9 : 02] The Russians have let him in for two years. And he doesn't know what's going to happen after that. Or there is another man who is actually living in a foreign embassy in London.

And if he sets foot off that soil, there is somebody waiting to arrest him and extradite him to the U.S. So sometimes leaving a place of safety creates the same kind of problems.

The Bible also tells of whole groups of people being exiled from a country and forbidden to return. The Babylonians did this twice to the Israelites, as you know, as a punishment for rebellions.

Often slavery was what awaited them at the other end. Slavery has been pretty popular forever in history because it's a free source of labor and therefore helps the economy.

We don't think of that this way, but human life was not always regarded in the same way we think of it. We don't often get the details of their experiences apart from the exceptions.

[10 : 07] The Bible is a little short on those, in my view. We do know that Daniel made out pretty well. He became important to the king, and he was not badly treated.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego escaped death. Remember, they refused not to keep the food rules that they had learned from the Bible. And the king said, you'll eat what I eat, or...

And they were actually consigned to a furnace to die, and would have done if God had not intervened. Just a sidebar here.

Beth mentioned my work with King Crest. And it was really one of the best experiences I've ever had as a volunteer, because I was working mainly with adults.

Although I did have a four-year-old in my class one day, because her father had not been here long enough to trust Canadians with the care of his child.

[11 : 05] And he wouldn't let anybody else look after her. No babysitters, nothing like that. So little Boudria sat in my class, and I think she probably learned as much English as her mother did.

But it was teaching adults, and I like this about adult education, that they're there because they want to be. Nobody says, get your coat on, it's time to go to school.

You know, or whatever happens to pre-adults. Nobody forces you to go. They're there to learn because they want to learn.

And they have life experience that really contributes a great deal to any of the classes. They're grown up, you know, they've been through a lot of things.

I never heard any of them talk about the bad things with regard to coming to Canada. Safety and anxiety were the major things that they actually told us.

[12 : 04] And we were able to get pretty close to some of these people because we didn't have the constraints that teaching pre-adults, you know, mustn't touch the child, mustn't hug him, you know, a pat on the back, somebody is going to blow the whistle on you.

No, it's not like that with adults. We had parties with them. I brought one family to this church. We could get, we could cross the usual boundaries that would apply between teacher and student with pre-adults.

And it was a very rewarding experience. But they did tell us about the happy things they missed. The 15th birthday of Latin American girls is a special occasion.

And a lot of them remembered that. Day of the dead, which we think is, oh my gosh, you know, a terrible name for a holiday. I learned that, no, it's not bad at all. We go to visit grandpa's grave.

We cook up all his favorite foods before we go. And we have a picnic there at the graveside. Well, that didn't actually sound too bad at all by the time they got through. But we don't hear the feelings of anguish that many of them have.

[13 : 09] The Bible does give us one of these experiences, which I think is very moving. It's from Psalm 137. And it refers to some of the Israelites who were in Babylon.

And they were slaves there for the most part. So try to picture this. They're by the waters of Babylon. The Babylonians are sitting there eating lunch, maybe, or something.

And they say to the Israelites, you know, entertain us. Tell us a joke. Play us a tune. Well, here is what they, and they say, well, you know, we're tired of our songs. You know, how about give us one of the songs of Babylon.

Here is what they see, or of your country, of Zion. By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors required mirth. Saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion.

[14 : 09] How shall we sing the Lord's song in an alien land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill.

Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you. If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. Well, here we have not just the facts, but also the feelings of the refugees.

Well, I mentioned David, the man who would be king. I think we hear more about David's life than almost anybody in the Old Testament. I mean, we've got him as a teenager out tending the sheep, and then, you know, all the way to his death, after he was anointed as a future king.

So, sheep tending, we know he was good at that. A handy fellow to have around when the Philistines attacked. And Saul, the king, knew that this is the child, the boy, that would succeed him.

That's an uncomfortable feeling for a lot of the kind of tyrants that ruled places in the Old Testament. Because it was quite common, especially with men who had multiple wives, for the kids to be in competition with each other about who would succeed daddy to the throne.

[15 : 22] And Saul knew that David would succeed him as king and that he had been chosen by God. David became a member of Saul's household, comforted him with his harp when Saul was feeling depressed, developing military skills, and making best friends with Jonathan, the king's son.

He was popular with the people. I mean, after all, he'd killed a giant, you know, and had leadership skills. And over some time, Saul began to perceive him as a threat to his life.

Now, there is no documented proof that David had any plans. David, twice, had a chance to kill Saul. And he wouldn't do it because he said he's God's anointed.

However, it didn't work the other way. Nowadays, we might say that Saul had developed a homicidal paranoia. Clearly, it was an out-of-control feeling. He threw a spear at David in the palace.

And later on, he tried again and again. It says a lot about his fighting skills that at close quarters in the palace, he missed. Yeah.

[16 : 33] But he then plotted against David requiring others to carry out the murder. Jonathan knew about this. And I think it's, you know, a story of conflicting loyalties is one of the archetypal stories of the language.

Where, well, Tristan and Isolde, King Mark and what's his name? Lancelot and King Arthur and so on.

Where you have two loves and they're competing about where you put your energy and strength. And there was Jonathan. He knew about his father's plots to kill his friend David.

And he persuaded him to leave and seek refuge in a neighboring country. He became useful there as a military leader. And the king of that country gave him land and allowed him to stay.

But unlike many refugees, David knew that someday he would return and take up his life as a leader of his people. That is not something that many of our refugees look forward to.

[17 : 38] A return might come while there is still great danger to them. You'll notice that in the last two examples I gave, both of these people had skills that they could use in the new land.

And they had a chance to use them, an opportunity to do that. And that, too, is not necessarily characteristic of many of the folk that come here. The last refugee I'll mention is Jesus.

Yeah, Jesus was a refugee. You know, we get so caught up in the angels and the shepherds and the gold, frankincense and myrrh that we don't really often think of him this way. But his life was in danger from soon after his birth.

We have no information at all about the time that Jesus lived in Egypt. But apparently he thrived there and he returned still as a young man, possibly a child, to Israel with his parents when the danger was passed.

Well, few of the refugees that come to Canada can contemplate a return to peace and safety in their native countries, unlike Cain and David. The skills that they bring are not always valued here.

[18 : 47] We have too many dentists. We don't need any more philosophers. You know, this kind of thing. Even though Canada makes provision for accepting folk seeking refuge here, the fact is that the legal process is lengthy and complicated and by no means a sure thing.

Last year, Canada only allowed about 15,000 people to remain here and build a new life. Those are people who have been successful in making a refugee claim.

We have some experience with this with the Shafgat family, who are not, they're still in a process there, you know. This is a group that another pastor, an Iranian pastor and his wife, Lauren.

But we also expelled people to Mexico, to the Czech Republic, to Romania, to India and others. So some of these people find it hard to leave Canada.

And if they remain, of course, they are illegal here and therefore not just in danger from their own country, but in some danger here. Many, meanwhile, thousands have flooded into Europe, into Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Spain, really the whole of the Mediterranean area that had any safe place to go.

[20 : 14] And it is changing the face of Europe in very significant ways. This could be us, you know. Well, we are only protected against that kind of influx by two oceans and a neighbour that is going to protect themselves and inadvertently us as well, I think.

Otherwise, we might very well have a similar experience here. Well, we want to hear more about Canada's response, but we're going to have a two-minute break while we rearrange the furniture or you get more coffee.

And that will happen now. Well, Lauren, I didn't know much about your background when I first met you at a picnic in the backyard or something like that. And I'm interested in knowing, how does somebody with a science degree from Trinity Western and an MDF from Regent get involved in this kind of work?

Right. Well, partly opportunistic, as anybody would be in their late 20s who doesn't have a job and has finished too many degrees.

So I was living in East Vancouver with my wife. I'd just finished at Regent. We'd been on a bit of a world trip. And the church that we were part of, Grandview Calvary Baptist Church, was really on a trajectory of vision and seeking to understand the neighbourhood, the Grandview Woodlands neighbourhood, and how to respond to the vulnerability of people in that neighbourhood at that time.

[21 : 49] So this was in the late 90s. Grandview's vision was really, let's build hubs of Christian community rooted in relationships, in housing contexts, in our neighbourhood, and just start addressing vulnerability issues.

And so we started talking about the refugees and refugee claimants who were part of that neighbourhood. Mosaic is a large settlement organisation located on Grand Street.

And inside their premise was a little organisation called Inland Refugee Society that was addressing the immediate needs of refugee claimants coming into Canada, and not the housing needs.

So we got in a dialogue with them, decided that we'd look into the idea of providing housing for this population. Hundreds of people coming into the metro Vancouver area without any housing.

And so sleeping, some sleeping cold on the street, others really moving in with the people they found on the street who spoke their language or whatever it might be, we call it couch surfing. Anyhow, that's the short story of how we got involved.

[23 : 07] We pitched the idea to a new society that had been birthed out of Grandview Baptist called Salisbury Community Society. And it was really the convergence of vision, a clear-headedness about the issues that were in our city, and as well capacity.

The Hawthorne Charitable Foundation was a family foundation that was part of our, the family were part of Grandview, and they said, you know, we want to help invest in this neighbourhood.

And so we were able to, we pitched the idea on Good Friday, 1998, and by July 1st, 1998, we actually moved in to a large seven-unit house where we began providing housing.

So I say opportunistic because we just jumped on it. But interestingly, I think now that I've been there 17 years and I'm in my late 40s, I've been having this whole other perspective on this thing.

And so it's almost like this retroactive vocational call in a way. But I think my personal experience has really been something that's been complementary to the Kinbrace mandate.

[24 : 22] So I grew up in Ethiopia. My parents were missionaries there. I grew up during the time of the Red Terror, when there was a lot of violence and persecution in the country.

And as a kid, I kind of witnessed persecution from this sort of cold, distant space of partly being a white person with some diplomatic immunity in the country.

But I've had some amazing sort of 360, 180, whatever it is, perspectives on how people in persecution respond. It's like, in many ways, the frog in the heating water.

People will stay home as long as they can before they finally jump. And so just in terms of refugee protection and all the laws around how the refugee laws work, it's giving me some really, I think, important insights personally.

And then, of course, growing up cross-culturally, I have a real interest in people from around the world. And I think my heart is at rest in an intercultural setting.

[25 : 30] Well, you certainly are getting people from around the world. The time that I had dinner at your place, Mohammed was making the stew.

And everybody says, oh, you'll like it tonight because Mohammed is cooking. And I didn't know what that meant until I tasted, I think, Moroccan spices or something in it while I was holding an Egyptian baby and trying to remember about 15 new names.

Well, so out of this vast group of refugees that are coming to Canada, how do they hear about you? Right. So just to give a little bit of perspective, Canada helps refugees, the world's refugees, really in four ways.

One is to give money to places like Syria and Lebanon and wherever the refugees are. So that's sort of a distance assistance. The second way is through government-assisted sponsorship.

So that's the Canadian government going to refugee camps around the world and bringing refugees to Canada. So it's about 5,000 assisted that way annually. And then the private sponsorship program, which you may be aware of, is churches and denominations and other groups proactively going out and bringing people to Canada who are refugees and helping them resettle.

[26 : 44] And then Canada has an inland refugee protection system, which basically is Canada's way of agreeing to international standards that if a person who needs refugee protection crosses a border, that state or that nation-state should respond to that need appropriately.

And so that's what Canada does. It's quite firm in its commitment. And so people who come across Canada's border and say, I need help, they enter into this inland refugee protection system where their case is determined and a decision is made against a very complicated set of laws, whether they in fact need protection.

And so that's the population we're working with, people who are arriving. So I can give you just a quick story of a family from Iraq who arrived recently, came across, actually came by plane on false passports, arrived in Canada and declared that they had false passports and that they needed refugee protection.

And so they went through the process. Long story in terms of how it all goes, but our system isn't perfect. It does have some catches to help people who have not been provided the correct process for refugee determination.

Anyhow, the long and short of it is this family now is settled in Canada. They have refugee protection, they're applying for permanent residence, five kids and a mum and moving on into life here in Canada.

[28 : 14] So Kinbrace is part of a, we provide housing. We're small in that context. And we work very collaboratively with the Canadian Red Cross and a number of other organizations to provide assistance.

So we're part of a whole referral network that then brings people to Kinbrace. Yeah. Yeah. Good. Well, Kinbrace is an intentional community. It's designed to do certain things, not just give somebody a bed and a roof over their heads.

So how is that different when people are making choices from some of the other folk helping refugees get settled? Yeah. Well, I think our primary offer to refugee claimants is housing.

If we have space and they're referred to us, we'll take them. So we don't screen people. We just, so long as they're refugee claimants and need housing, then we're loaded. And who refers them? The Canadian Red Cross.

It sort of starts if they have a program called First Contact, which is at the borders and at the airport. Yeah. 24-7 multilingual phone line that people can contact. And then that puts them forward to Inland Refugee Society, who then kind of has a handle on what their direct needs are.

[29 : 31] And then if they need housing and we have space, they'll end up at Kinbrace. Would this be a good spot to show the little clip, the little film? We could. Maybe I'll just talk a little bit about Kinbrace first.

We're, architecturally, we're two houses, nine apartments between the two houses. And we actually have in our little playhouse some furniture from the Paynes.

I think you built it, Chris, way back when. Got it from Jennifer. Nice little children's play equipment. Yeah. Little cupboards and whatnot. Anyhow, so I live there with my family.

There's another family who came as refugees 11 years ago. They also live there. So we're a community of Canadians welcoming newcomers living together. And we have five values that guide us as a community.

The first is welcome. And that's really living into the very large, amazing, wonderful, biblical call to welcome the stranger. And every day that's a new experience for us and a new engagement.

[30 : 38] Our second value is trust. We believe that as fellow humans on the face of the earth, the best way to welcome people is with 100% trust. If something needs, some boundaries need to set up around that, then you do that later.

But if we welcome people in suspicion, A, we burn out because it takes a lot of energy to manage suspicion. And secondly, especially people seeking refugee protection, it's really the last thing they need is more suspicion.

They've run for their lives. They've traveled dark valleys, the smuggling routes. It's very, very dangerous. And so to be welcomed in trust, we think, is a gift. And to be trustworthy ourselves, of course.

Our third value is what we call mutual transformation. And that's really the willingness to listen to each other and to change and to grow. We try to minimize the service provider type model and more relational engagement and growth and development that way.

It's a mutual transformation. The fourth value is celebration. We recognize hope in the midst of incredible sorrow for people. And I think our learning day by day is that people who have traveled the dark valleys, in fact, have a way of understanding hope more profoundly than many of the rest of us do who have fairly stable and safe lives.

[32 : 04] Yesterday, we celebrated two baby showers. One was for my colleague's daughter, Winnie. And the other is a new woman who's just arrived from Morocco, has gained refugee protection.

And her daughter was born just a week apart from my colleague's daughter. And so an amazing celebration on a beautiful Saturday afternoon to Kinbrace.

People from around the world coming together and enjoying new life. And introducing them to the Canadian tradition of baby showers. Exactly. Yeah.

Exactly. Lots of explanation around that. And our fifth value is prayer. And for me personally, it really becomes the rooting place for all these other values.

But it's really about the recognition of God in our midst. And I think the God of these biblical stories and characters that you've talked about this morning, Sheila, where life is rugged and faith is that sustaining stepping stone in a way in otherwise dark times.

[33 : 20] And so we've experienced so much grace at Kinbrace over the years. So much gift. And so it's just a posture of gratitude as well. And that works even with people that have other faith interests.

Absolutely. Yeah. I think what we've discovered at Kinbrace is we need to be honest to our own religious traditions. And so we openly tell people that we are Christians.

We don't have an agenda to make other people Christians. We feel that in a context of a real moment of need, the last thing people need is some agenda on their lives.

Rather, they need a safe place where they can fit together their own, what makes sense to them. So for Muslims, they've got to get to a mosque to pray.

So we'll help them find the nearest mosque that is in their tradition. And it's amazing how the conversations begin to open up.

[34 : 23] And I think prayer is one of those joining pieces rather than dividing pieces in religious traditions. Do you want to do the thing here? Sure. I'll show you a little video of Kinbrace.

This place, incidentally, for those of you who know where the cult is. Anybody know where the cult is? Yeah. You know where the cult is? Okay. It's just down the street from that.

Two houses, very different architecturally, but joined at the hip. Sheila, can you move back a little bit? And then... I would have been here with tape on the floor to know exactly what you're doing.

I don't know exactly where this thing is supposed to go. I couldn't get across Main Street. Oh, gosh. So I'm a little bit late.

Yeah. Yeah.

[35 : 28] Yeah. I know where the lights are.

That's not bad, is it?

So this is actually a brand new video that we've created. We've never done a video at Kinbrace before, so we're really excited to have it done. It'll be up on our website hopefully this year, this week.

So you're the first to see it. One of the first. Okay, so I know what's going on here.

I think I have a good internet connection. You think church in Vancouver works?

[37 : 32] It's the name on the sign.

I'm going to flip to a different connection here through my phone. Everyone just be patient for a second.

Maybe Sheila can do a dance to entertain you. Not really. But I will tell you a story while we're waiting, okay?

One of the things that Kinbrace did, and my son carted me along to this because he thought I was going to ask him to make the Thanksgiving dinner otherwise. It was a Thanksgiving dinner held by this group at Grandview Church down in the basement.

And I was at a table with a number of Tamil ladies, mothers, with their children. Their husbands and other men were in detention.

[38 : 34] I think some of those people still are in detention, aren't they? All those families are out and have refugee protection now. Okay. But you will remember that that ship arrived on our shore with 400 potential refugees and really were abandoned by the people that had brought them here.

So the first Canadians they met were the Navy protecting our shores. But the women who had children were allowed out of the detention situation.

So that the kids could attend school. And I was at a table, boy we really improved the sign language at my table. Because most of them did not know English.

And the kids were having a great time. But the mothers were displaying quite a bit of anxiety about getting food into the child. I mean given the abundance on our tables that was a lesson for me about what has made them so worried about when will the food stop.

Are you ready? Are you ready for good? Space Walls Account I'm ready for good. Great. Thank you. I'm ready for good.

[40 : 02] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

My mom was scared more than all of us because we didn't really realize what is happening. And we didn't feel that scared anymore because we knew that there are people out there who actually care about us.

And they don't care where they came from or what they look like. And we felt like it's our second home now. Lots of things grow here at Cambridge.

[41 : 59] Gardens grow in the backyard every summer. And the noise level and energy grows as people come on Tuesday nights and eat dinner together. And relationships grow here in really meaningful ways.

And I've seen over the years friendships develop while people are cooking together in the kitchen or washing dishes after a meal, playing in the backyard or basketball hoop, jumping on the trampoline or being at games night.

And I've seen the way that these relationships carry and sustain people through incredibly difficult and stressful situations. What we're really interested in is welcoming people who are seeking refugee protection as though they're our brothers and sisters.

And we're really interested in the way that we're seeking refugee protection as though they're our brothers and sisters.

Canadians living with newcomer refugees side by side, learning from each other, teaching each other, listening to each other, and really developing long-lasting relationships that go on and on through the years of early settlement here in Canada.

[43 : 35] Canadians living withector, emphasizing through toweringing allows people to gainRNA. They're meant to work hard and, in combination, upgrading into processes are often valuable throughout the UK. When we were born with local ■■■■■■ should of all be in relation to the burden. Anastasia mo Knight of Indonesia West did not practical, on-translation I saw the flame argentina as though they are Pascal oxine Odd- model extraction and more people will sort of enter.

Mathias on IRWALK- yarn TUbertus for trial of Wil prydenus Cuomo-indul pays. Let's understand meteorite ■■■■■■ is what we'll consume with, which makes sense of a lot more people came up to demand. Secure, it comes to the new government with super Est Tamara andcroft is able to advance our business.

Should we our brothers Marins■? The woman that first spoke with Marina, was she from El Salvador or something like that? Mariana, she's actually Russian, from Russia.

Oh. Yeah. You said you were based in a country, was it, I forget, the name didn't sound clear. Ethiopia. Oh, is that what you were based? Yeah, in East Africa, yeah.

Well, let's just move that out of the way and continue here, because I can tell that people are anxious to ask you questions of their own. Thank you for that.

[44 : 40] Are we the first people to see that? Pretty close. Oh, great. Yeah. That's great. Well, you have these five things, guidelines. The five is good.

It reminds me of the five pillars. Sort of. But people understand this when they come to Kimbray, so it would be self-selecting in a way. They wouldn't come if that sort of entree did not appeal to them.

No, because really what we do is we have this amazing gift of architecture and safe apartments and clean apartments. And so really that's what we're offering people.

So when they come, we have no expectation that they'll engage this community. But I think what we immediately learned as soon as we provided the housing was that there's a whole incredible amount of need that is accompanying people who are seeking refugee protection.

And so that's when we started to develop other wraparound supports for them. And just I think in that responsiveness and actually living side by side.

[45 : 47] We all have separate apartments, but they're all in one building. You just trust begins to develop. And yeah, amazing gifts unfold out of that.

Not everybody wants to stay there. Tell us about somebody who wanted to leave or felt that it was not a good fit. Right. Well, I think there's almost two categories of people.

One category are people who have lived such incredible lives in their own worlds. Diplomats, professional people, people with strong identities in their own countries, which is what in fact has gotten them into hot water in the first place.

And the courage it takes, there was one gentleman who just moved out with his family from Kimbrace. They've now moved into Burnaby. And as he was in our sort of final farewell, he says, you have no idea the courage it takes to become a refugee.

Meaning the courage it takes to step out of that world that you've known and that you've tried to hang on to for so long. But then the pressures become so great that you do have to make this conscious decision to become very, very, very vulnerable.

[47 : 06] And really give yourself up to systems and to another country and to a whole new way of uncertainty. And so living at Kimbrace is a catch-22.

They really, really appreciate the support and the help. But we are a charity and we make videos like this that we try to help tell the story. But people don't like being charity cases.

People like being diplomats. People like being doctors and whatever. So we really try to live a life of integrity there and create promotional material as well that we're happy for them to read should they come across it.

Good idea. But also tells the story to outsiders who might be interested. But those kind of people, I think in some ways they feel a relief to move out of Kimbrace and start their lives again and fresh.

We have had a few people. People who've traveled the face of the earth too long without a home can get into trouble in their own ways.

[48 : 12] Addictions can become an issue. And, yeah, we've just had probably out of the 450 people we've assisted with housing over the years, maybe two or three who didn't belong there in terms of their own values and their own quest in life.

So, but our experience is that over and over again, having a value of trust, you don't have to give eviction notices.

You just have to look at people in the eye and they know that they don't belong there and that they need to move on. But those are such rare stories. They can consume a lot of energy in the moment.

But providing housing to the world's displaced people is an incredible gift. But there are small risks that come with it too. Yes, and risks to your family as well as to them.

I think that's terribly courageous. Raising your family with children and with people who have different values sometimes, that takes guts, I think.

[49 : 19] Like the man I told you who wouldn't leave his daughter with anybody but his wife, it was very difficult for him to trust. When he came one night to a community dinner that we had for the teaching group and the students, he looked into where the group was, came up to pick up his wife, could not see his daughter.

And he instantly went to panic stations. He was in a sweat. He was grabbing me by the hand and, you know, where is she? Where is Boudria? And I said, it's fine. No, come on, I'll take you.

Because the little children had been removed to a playroom while the rest of the program went on. And he just couldn't stand not to know where she was minute by minute. So I can hear what you're saying there.

You mentioned, no, you didn't mention. Tell us about the book that you wrote. I can see it right over there. Right here. We talked about how complicated the refugee application process was.

Right. And this is a delightful book to look at and also to work your way through. Because it's sort of step by step and a tick list.

[50 : 29] You know, when you have your documents lined up here, then you can turn the page and go to that. When you finish that, ticking off things, you can go to the next one. And it really is a terrific guide right through the whole project.

How did that come about? Well, I think something like this comes about through listening. And as we were living with refugee claimants, one of the things we noticed was they need help in so many ways.

So we started to build a little bit of a staffing team to assist people. And then we also became very aware that when they go for their refugee hearings at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, they didn't know where they were going, what to expect, who was going to be there, how the process worked.

And so we pitched an idea in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Immigration and Refugee Board and said, you know what would be wonderful is if refugee claimants could actually come into one of these hearing rooms, have a tour, have an explanation of what happens, and get more oriented and prepared for their refugee hearings.

And amazingly, the IRB just picked up on this idea, and that was in 2008. And so we ran it here in Metro Vancouver for a number of years.

[51 : 45] They're called Ready Tours. And we gave them that strategic name because we convinced the Refugee Board what they're interested in is hearing readiness. They like people coming into the hearing rooms prepared.

And so we said, well, this will help. So these Ready Tours have now replicated to Toronto and Montreal. In the context of these tours, which we facilitated, we heard a lot of questions that refugee claimants were asking.

And we knew that they were leaving these tours with a lot of information having gone in one ear, but no way to process it in the time, in the moment. So we wrote a very simple little sort of 8.5 by 11 guide to a lot of the information that was being spoken and realized that we created something that there wasn't anything like it in Canada, which has since become this, which was launched in Metro Vancouver a year ago, April 30th, in a number of languages.

And it's really just a step-by-step introduction to how to make a refugee claim, but more specifically how to prepare for the refugee hearing, which is the most important moment in their claim for refugee protection.

The ongoing good news is that as soon as we launched it here, everywhere else in Canada wanted it adapted to their region as well.

[53 : 03] And so by July we'll have 30 different editions in 11 languages in all the six refugee processing places in Canada.

So Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary. And so very exciting. It'll be available, we're estimating, to about 75% of refugee claimants who are coming into Canada, which will probably be about 10,000 next year, online and in print as well.

Yeah. No, I think that's tremendously helpful. We had one staff member at Kingcrest, which is a part of the Mennonite Central Committee organization, arguably the best refugee organization in the world, I think.

And one person was helping with all the documentation. You know, we read, we understand this language, but when it comes to bureaucraties and stuff, it's a mystery in many cases.

And one staff member helping them fill out forms, this is going to be a tremendous help, somewhere like that. Now, you mentioned Grandview Calgary at the beginning. How important is it to have a connection with a faith group to the success of King Grace?

[54 : 22] Yeah, I think it's an invisible force, is what it is. The way I describe the Grandview community is really, we're all praying in the same direction.

And that's very, very powerful. I've seen other organizations try to start houses like this, and they haven't really been that successful, which is a shame.

But I think one of the gifts we've had is this massive, well, it's not really massive, but this group of people who are all thinking and praying in the same direction.

So a huge support. And it doesn't translate into financial support, necessarily, from Grandview Baptist Church. I don't think we've gotten a dime from the church itself. But incredible visionary support and volunteers as well.

So, yeah, I think churches and faith communities are profoundly powerful to do good. That's great. Just a couple of questions, because I know these people have their own.

[55 : 29] To ask you, everything that I have ever attended with regard to King Grace, I met alumni turning up for the summer picnic, turning up for the celebration of some kind.

And that interested me, that people keep coming back, even when they move out to Burnaby, get a job somewhere else, that this is a connection that they value and want to maintain.

How does that work? Yeah. Well, it seems like, I mean, in a way, it's the first family. And many people actually say that. So that's their words, King Grace is like my family.

And so it's just, it's a very comfortable, safe place to belong, I think. Our work is actually trying to de-stick people from us and say, go start your own life.

Help them graduate. Help them graduate. Which we have mechanisms to do that, so that they're not coming back for services to our little office, which is really focused on the newcomers.

[56 : 28] But the relational aspects, we're more than happy to continue those relationships. And from 17 years ago, we still meet and drink tea with those who arrived, who are now Canadians and business owners and all the nine, you know, awards.

It would be great if you could expand this, but I met the real estate guy that helped you find those two houses at one of these parties. And he said, well, there's just no way we can expand it here.

You know what the price of real estate is like in Vancouver. But you are actually planning an expansion, aren't you? Well, I think we're open to it. Surrey, there's a huge need there.

That's where most of the refugee claimants are settling, and there's no services at all for refugee claimants in Surrey. I think the biggest barrier is architecture and real estate.

We have enough people, I think, who carry the vision with us that we could easily replicate that way. But it's really real estate is the barrier. What about the man, tell us about the man, that came to your meeting?

[57 : 30] And he was a member, I think, of a... Oh, right, from Fleetwood Church. Yeah. Yeah, well, we have a welcoming event for people like you, if you're interested, called Becoming Neighbors.

And it's an intimate, by invitation, event to come to Kinbray's, learn the Kinbray's story, its history, hear some stories from people who've lived there. So, sort of through...

Usually I'm quite intentional about who comes, but this one man showed up who had been invited by somebody else who couldn't make it, and a big guy comes in the door. I thought, who have we got here?

Tall and Dutch. And anyhow, he sat and listened very intently through the whole thing. And as he walked out the door, I said, you know, has this been helpful for you?

I didn't kind of know where he even came from. No. And he says, yeah, I'm taking a lot away with me. Well, he phoned a week later and said, we've formed a refugee committee at our church, and we want to help you.

[58 : 31] I said, wow. He says, what I observed, he said, is that you welcome people in your front door, but it's hard to find housing and support out the back door.

He said, if we can help you do that, we'll do that. And so we're actually just arranging with the first family now. They found housing for them out in Surrey and will provide all sorts of support.

It's a long distance between East Van and Surrey as well. So for us to kind of continue those relationships, it's hard. So to have this congregation of people who are just so incredibly generous and have opened their doors, literally to people coming out of Cambridge.

I mean, it's a win-win all around, because we've helped orient people to Canada generally. And so there's a whole piece that's done for this church now who's taking them on and helping them settle.

So a great gift. Not everything that God does happens in mysterious ways. Sometimes it's bang. Yeah. Just one last question. How has this kind of work, which does include your whole family, I mean, his kids are growing up with refugee kids coming and going.

[59 : 38] How has it enriched the life of your family? Well, it's a very, very rich environment. And I'll tell two quick stories.

One just comes from last night where we had a party. And this is a really long story. But one of the pastors at Grandview Baptist Church actually came as a refugee claimant through Cambridge.

And that's how he got connected into the community from Burundi. Long story of his wife passing away while he was here in the process and just tragic. And his kids eventually came.

And anyhow, he's Canadian now and is a missionary back to Burundi. Oh, yeah. I met him. Emmanuel. Yeah. Emmanuel. Emmanuel. You know him. Okay.

Yeah. Well, he's in Burundi now. And of course, Burundi is in its own chaos today as we speak. And so we're keeping up to date with his situation there. But he just got married last weekend to another widower, a widow.

[60 : 39] And so this beautiful story of a marriage and a wedding. And so we had a big celebration at Grandview Baptist last night that included dancing.

And I was... It's going to be a first in the Baptist church. Well, here we go. You see that? I grew up kind of in a very conservative evangelical context where dancing was actually on the no list.

Oh, yeah. And so I don't have a dancing sinew in my body, which I don't know whether to blame someone for that or what. But what delighted me is to see my kids dancing with their good friend who originally came from Mexico as a refugee.

And they've learned how to dance at Kinbrace from people from around the world. And it's part of this mutual transformation. If you can learn to dance somebody else's dance, that's a lot of work, especially when you don't know how to dance to begin with.

So there's that kind of rich, rich milieu of cultural engagement. And my daughter is attending at Little Flower Academy, sort of in this neighborhood, I think, a bit.

[61 : 52] It's a Catholic girls' school. And she came home a couple weeks ago and she said, You know, Dad, we're studying about Islam in school. And she said, I didn't realize I know so much about Islam.

And just by living together and honoring the Ramadan fast with those who are fasting and Eid, celebrating Eid with those who celebrate. And so to me, I'm really, really pleased that my children are, in a way, infleshing these other traditions and understanding them.

Because I think our world needs understanding in a deep gut place rather than sort of just head knowledge. So really, really, really rich for our kids. It hasn't been easy.

I don't think it's a transitional housing context. And so kids come and go. Yeah. But new family moved in from Afghanistan on the weekend or on last week, Thursday.

And as I was out working in the backyard, you know, my son, who's 12, made up a big smoothie and all the kids were lined up.

[62 : 58] These newcomer kids who just arrived with my son all drinking smoothies. So that's the... Somehow, for me, that's the way the world needs to be. Yeah. Engaged and engaging.

Sounds good. We've... This has been really quite interesting, Lauren. And we've got about maximum 10 minutes or less for some other questions if people want to.

Go ahead. I'm sure your night apartment's 100% full of retirement. Is there a time limit that you expect people to stay and do you help them find housing afterwards?

Yeah. Good question. So when people move in, they're so overwhelmed. They've got a stack of paper that thick from immigration. They don't know who we are, what they've come for.

So one of the key messages we give people right at the beginning when they move in is this isn't permanent housing for you. So we sign a four-month lease with them just so that they get the idea that they're going to be moving on.

[63 : 59] So then that done, everybody knows it's temporary. But then we work with every family and every person uniquely to make sure their needs are met. So generally, they finish their refugee hearing.

They have a decision on their claim. And we're currently running about 90% success rate with their claims for protection in the house. Wow. And so then the messaging that we have to start getting is, you know what?

The biggest gift you give to somebody who's out there who doesn't have a home, who's just arrived, is for you to move out. And people understand that because they know that experience of being homeless in a strange world.

And so there's transition at that point. And we help people find a place. We help them furnish the place and really help them get set up in a new context fully.

Thank you. I'm wondering, how many refugees do you take in every year? And when is that, as a percentage of the total number of refugees that come to the world? And how many other homes are there?

[65 : 03] Yeah, good question. So last year, there were about 700 refugee claimants that came into the Metro Vancouver area. We help with housing between 25 to 35 people.

So it's, I don't know, what's that? 0.5%? I don't know. Small number. It tend to be the most vulnerable ones who really are, just don't have anything.

There is another organization called Journey Home. Community. And they started about 10 years ago. And they're mainly located in the Burnaby New West area. We work very closely together.

Their model is a little bit different than ours, but still involved with housing. Belkin House Salvation Army provides some housing for refugee claimants.

It's really strictly housing. They don't provide any supports. And that's it. So there's not a lot of assistance. So that's why we're really keen to replicate. And the need is huge.

[66 : 05] And if we'd fill all the space that we could create, for sure. Yeah. Do they sometimes feel a little bit embarrassed? Maybe if you try to be friendly with them, they feel embarrassed because they're living in a house that they didn't pay for worth their own money.

So do you think sometimes they might be a bit anti-social result? Well, it's a really perceptive question. Dignity is really at the heart of all of our longings, I think, as humans.

And so, you know, even something as simple as donations. People give clothing, they give pots and pans, and we have a table that we set it out on. We call it, amongst the staff, the table of shame.

People won't come to that table to take stuff until it's kind of quiet and no one's around. And then they'll come in and help themselves. So how do we provide space and stuff with dignity to people?

I think what we try to do is just live genuinely as human to human, and that helps to dispel shame. And to really discover what are the gifts that each person has that are coming.

[67 : 16] And so for those who can cook for our community meals, you saw in the video here, really important. People have that opportunity to contribute. It's big, really important. And that's a small thing.

How is the operation finance? They own people, they own housing by refugees. Yeah, so the houses themselves are owned by a charitable foundation, Hawthorne Foundation. Our charity leases from Hawthorne.

We partner very closely together. And then it's foundations and churches and individual donors. All the way, we don't have any government funding.

So it's all about Canadians kicking in generously. Yeah. Do you have good relationships with your neighbours?

We have amazing relationships with our neighbours. You know, when we started, we were in touch with other communities like this across Canada, just to gain some wisdom.

[68 : 19] And they said, don't ask anybody's permission, just do it. And so they, we, these are, the one is a duplex, one of our houses. And right next door to it is, is a seven unit apartment building.

So it's zoned as an apartment building. So we're, we're operating well within the bylaws. And so we're, what, what, what's in the grey zone is that we're operating with a, with a vision towards relationship building and community building.

And no fence between the properties. And so we're an exuberant place. You know, ten kids out in the backyard together. And so our, our only tension with neighbours, who are incredibly generous, many of them volunteer, some support financially, is, can you guys tone it down over there a little bit?

Just tell the kids to stop screaming. So then we shuffle everyone out to the park. So we'll meet some of these people at the Grandview Park, will we?

Watching the grandpas playing bachi ball and stuff. Yeah. It's been great to have you with us, Lauren. Is there one more question? Yeah, this is not so much a question as a statement.

[69 : 30] But those of the St. John's people who heard Jamie Turner give his testimony at 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock last Sunday would have heard about an Afghan family that they would like to bring over and have the church sponsor.

I actually met the family in Delhi about six weeks ago. And so a committee in St. John's is being formed to assist them with the documentation.

They had to play Afghanistan because they converted to Christianity and they're terrified and deadly that they found out and are not happy there.

So just so everyone's aware that that might come up. That's fantastic. Interesting. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much, Lauren. We're going to need an update, I think, in another year or something like that.

Sure. Well, thank you. And it was great of you to take your time. Let's.