

## Moravian Women's Association - Home and Overseas Paper - September 2017

### Refugees: by Edwin Quildan

I recently attended a training session with the Ministers of the URC Thames North and Eastern Synod during the week of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017, concerning their work in northern France with migrants and refugees. I encourage you to read these Bible passages whilst considering how we treat or engage with migrants or refugees.

- Matthew Ch. 14 vv 13 - 21: Jesus had compassion and fed the hungry and there was more than enough left over.
- Mark Ch. 7 vv 24 - 30: The Greek born Syrian Phoenician woman comes to Jesus and asks for her daughter to be healed. Initially Jesus rebuffs her and as she persists, Jesus heals her daughter.
- Ruth Ch. 1 vv 1 - 22: Ruth and her family leave Bethlehem for Moab because of a famine. They went in search of a better life. Then things do not go as they expected.

### ***“not all migrants or refugees want to get to the UK”***

There are three groups of migrants or refugees: (1) Those who want to gain asylum in France (2) Those who want to transit to the UK (3) Those who want to join family somewhere in Europe. We were reminded that in Lille the largest group of migrants or refugees are from Mali and they are seeking to stay in France.

### ***“Waiting! Waiting! Travelling light”***

Churches will quietly supply food, clothes, and sleeping bags although this is risky as it breaks French law. Tents are needed but they are more difficult to pass over whilst the other things can be covertly provided. Funds are always an issue. The Churches work together. The French government says that providing help will encourage them to gather or stay. This is not true, as we were told that the migrants or refugees are just waiting for a call from their traffickers that will give them their next instruction. Many are just waiting for their signal by phone to move quickly for their onward destination.

### ***“how do the migrants or refugees get ‘Smartphones’?”***

This question is asked over and over. It would appear that there are sophisticated gangs or underground networks in place that are organising, directing, arranging and equipping them. Large sums of money are believed to be changing hands to ensure that the movement of people continues.

### ***“not all migrants or refugees are Angels”***

Some of the different groups fight with each other. There have also been injuries or worse. There are still some culture divides amongst them. Sometimes it is the survival of the fittest. A number of migrants or refugees also end up in prison.

### ***“it is not about converting Moslems to Christianity”***

The humanitarian need to help people in need was stressed. One reason given for not converting the migrants or refugees is that they become stuck. If they were Muslims and

convert, they cannot go back to their families or home country as in many cases they will be killed or expelled from the family or village. The story is told of a lone refugee who converted to Christianity, attends the services, cannot speak French, who just sits and smiles. The Church does what it can, but that person is now stuck. Churches also do not want to encourage false conversions, if a person thinks that becoming a Christian may assist a claim for residence.

***“Reflect on these photographs and see what they tell you”***

The three images were photographed at a display about migrants in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Dunkirk containing twelve images. They are painted by the artist Domonique.



This one was called the jungle



Fronteres Espagne



No title given