

# *Refugees:*

## *A Harvest Field*

### *Ripe for the Gospel*

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Three decades have passed since John Paul II penned the words of *Redemptoris Missio* (*Mission of the Redeemer*) that so stirred this man's heart. His words burned in my heart like a fire when I read them in the early 1990s. They stirred afresh the flames of the call that God placed in my heart as a seven-year-old boy:

"Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time." (RM, 92)

Three decades later, we live in a world where the bulk of this spiritual work is still ahead of us. Less than one-third of the world makes any claim to Christian conversion. Five billion people are still awaiting someone to proclaim

the hope of the Gospel and a call them to conversion/ Baptism.

One of the places that stands out as exceptionally ripe for the initial proclamation of the Gospel, conversion, discipleship and formation of Holy Spirit empowered preachers are refugee camps. The "by the numbers" chart on the second page of this newsletter shows what a massive throng of humanity this awaits Jesus in this precarious situation. The vast majority of them are non-Christian who were leading normal lives until war destroyed the places in which they were living. These camps are the compilation of the towns and city blocks of the families present during the week that they were destroyed by the bombs, tanks, missiles and machine guns.

While many hope to return to their home country, that is not a possibility for those that fled totalitarianism and have applied for asylum (2 million in 2019 alone) or the 4.2 million that current lack citizenship in any country. Many of these people can never return to their homeland. Many have served prison or jail terms in their homeland when caught trying to escape in the past. They have very little hope of ever seeing most of their family again.

The 8.6 billion dollars to run these camps came from individual governments and the European Union (86%), individual and corporations (10%) and the operating budget of the United Nations (1%). Refugees survive in a system of food vouchers, donated clothes from plastic shipping barrels and an impromptu economy of upstart businesses and markets in the camp. These refugee camps provide a difficult life that is a refuge from the tragedy, loss and hardship left behind mixed with a degree of safety and

stability of the current situation and a hope for the future.

### **Centers of Conversion**

In a practical sense, many of these refugee camps provide an ideal place to proclaim the kerygma (the first, conversion bringing proclamation of the Gospel) to the residents. These residents are nearly entirely non-Christians living in difficult circumstances living with the hope of finding a better life on earth. This is an ideal setting to proclaim the Gospel and demonstrate its power. The Gospel offers not merely a better life here on earth, but offers a hope of an eternity of a perfect life in heaven: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

### **Centers of Discipleship**

New believers need to be prepared for Baptism. This is the responsibility of the existing outreach of the Catholic Church that exists in many of these camps on a limited scale. Over time, the new converts can be utilized in preparing later groups. This has always been a hallmark of our ministry in the foreign mission field: we don't just call the lost to Jesus, we put them to work building the Kingdom of God.

Our evangelistic rallies with prayer for healings and miracles and our week-long school on Holy Spirit empowered evangelism are both perfect for this situation. Participants will begin proclaiming the Gospel to those of their own language and culture with them in the refugee camp will be equipped to continue the work in whatever nation they eventually settle. Refugee camps and the transitional cities of Asia where people live for less than 10 years before moving to another nation provide a unique opportunity to prepare preachers of the Gospel to go to the nations of the world.

## By the Numbers

79.5 million

forcibly displaced people in the worlds at the end of 2019.

45.7 million

people internally displaced with their own country.

26 million

refugees living in camps.

17 years

avg. length of stay in refugee camp.

68%

of the world's refugees come from these five countries: Syria (6.6M), Venezuela (3.7M), Afghanistan (2.7M), South Sudan (2.2M) and Myanmar (1.1M).

40%

of the world's displaced persons are under 18 years of age.

80%

of the world's displaced people are in countries or territories affected by acute food insecurity & malnutrition

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largest camps are in Kenya, the largest being Kakuma with a population of more than 184,000.

source: United Nations HCR, online, internet, October, 2020.