
Focus: 1). Exposing our congregation to missions; 2). Encouraging the missionary family; 3). Allowing our congregants to build a greater and deeper relationship with our missionary family; 4). Working with our missionary family among Syrian, Iraqi, and South Asian refugees in Greece.

Day 1: The Greece team met at CBC at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, May 9th 2017. We were prayed over by the church staff and leaders. When it was time to go, we all exchanged hugs. We grabbed some food and snacks then took a taxi van to JFK airport. The driver was a Pakistani Muslim. Pastor Alfonse got to speak to him in Urdu and Punjabi. Pastor Alfonse shared with him about the missions trip and his faith in Christ with the driver. We ran into a little traffic, but arrived about two hours before our departure. Our flight from JFK to Istanbul was nine hours. At the Istanbul airport we had about a six hour layover. There the group met for about an hour for a little more missions training. As we boarded the next flight for Greece, David expressed his desire to become a flight attendant.

The flight to Greece from Turkey wasn't as long, so that was good. Once we went through security and claimed our luggage, we were greeted by Dimitris, our CBC missionary, and his wife, Joanna, who then drove us to our hotel. Since Elizabeth Dixon was the only female in our team, she stayed with our CBC missionary family.

Day 2: We started the morning with an ample breakfast of Greek yogurt, an omelet, orange juice, tea, coffee, and sausages. We had a short devotion and then drove off in a van and a rental car to a hospital called St. Luke’s. The hospital belongs to our partner missions organization, AMG International. We met with a Greek doctor who was very gracious to sit with us, gave us the history of the hospital told how he started it, how God had blessed the hospital, how he shared the gospel, and put Bibles in each of the rooms. The hospital had 250 beds and a small prayer room, with about 5 floors and about half of the staff are Christians. It was very clean and well kept. Our CBC missionary brings refugees to this hospital for treatment.
Missions Trip to Greece May 2017

From there we went to the refugee day care center that is run by our missionary. We engaged refugees in conversations and tried to understand their situation. As we worked, we met another missions group from the U.K. The refugees were from Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and Nepal. There were also a few children who were watching the Jesus film in Arabic. George sat down with a young man from Pakistan and asked him his story. “He shared with me in fairly good English his long journey of almost a year through Iran, Turkey, and Greece,” George says. George shared the gospel with him, but the Pakistani man wasn’t able to articulate what he thought about the Gospel because he said his English was limited.

Later Pastor Alfonse was able to share the gospel with him in Urdu and explained further. George got invited to view the abandoned building where the Pakistani refugees were staying. He found out that since they were not considered high risk refugees, the Greek government or UNHCR did not recognize them or provide them with temporary housing or legal documents to reside in the country.

After the work for the day, one of the ladies cooked lasagna for us and it was great. We all ate well!

Day 3: We started the day with breakfast and team devotions. We left by 9 a.m. to visit a refugee camp up in the mountains. It has a population of about 200, of which 100 are children. It was a beautiful place. Very scenic! We gave the kids shoe box gifts. These shoe box gifts were from kids in Holland and were filled with little things like toys, crayons, coloring books, hair scrunches, and nail polish. After we had given out all the gifts, the kids went back to their classes which were held in blue and orange portables. We went into one of the blue portable classes. Pastor Alfonse utilized his knowledge of Arabic and began to teach them how to create a sentence in English. First David helped in the front, then Elizabeth. The kids were very enthusiastic. They all wanted to speak at once. They enjoyed learning new English words. All the kids were very bright. After David and Elizabeth switched places, David sat next to a young boy. David asked the boy where he was from and he said Iraq. The boy asked David the same question. When the boy found out that we were from America, he was so excited. George and Richard were sitting with other boys and engaging in conversations. When it was time for us to go, all the girls gave Elizabeth hugs, the boys did the same to David then we all said goodbye. The boy who sat next to David ran after us to give David his favorite toy that he had been playing with earlier in the class.

“It’s crazy how the media portrays certain cultures and ethnicities to behave a very way. These Iraqi and Syrian kids were the most - sweetest kindhearted people I’ve met,” said Elizabeth.

We were told not to take pictures of the children's faces nor post them on any social media platforms in order to keep their privacy safe because some families could be in danger if we were to do that. After
visiting this camp, we went to have lunch and to tour the city of Berea. We walked in downtown Berea and passed the town square that had some remnant architecture from the Byzantine era. We had some traditional Greek food for lunch, eggplant, spicy cheese, some roasted chicken and pork with pita, and some potatoes. It was really nice and different than what we eat in the U.S. The food in general was very rich with lots of cheese, olive oil, and meat. Later Dimitris recommended that we get some local dessert which was a specialty. We also had some gelato which was a real treat. We took a tour of an historic local church. We had met the pastor at the refugee camp a few miles away. He gave us the history of the church and also told us about the present congregation there and the state of evangelicals in Greece. We went to a section of Berea that had a statue of Paul the apostle that was donated by Russian authorities a few years ago. It was amazing to stand in a public area where the pastor said Paul could have stood and given some speeches or had debates more than 2000 years ago.

Day 4: We visited the Roma kids at the gypsy camp. Dimitris had told us beforehand that stealing runs in their blood. Someone had told us how somebody had stolen a person’s car right on the sight and took it apart to sell the pieces for money. So they warned us to keep a close eye on our belongings. When we got out of the car there were a few kids staring at us, whispering in little huddles. They huddled in circles a lot.

We taught some of the kids the English alphabet. It was difficult because they were misbehaving by standing on the tables, smacking each other, and pulling other kids’ hair. So we just had to be patient with them. Every time we would want them to listen, we would have to say “akoúo” which means "listen". We made learning the alphabet into a game. Elizabeth wrote the letter “A” on a whiteboard and drew a picture of an apple next to it. When we touched the top of the kids’ heads they had to say "A". When we touched their shoulders, they had to say "Apple." They got it eventually.

We only went up to the letter “B”, because we'd be there all day long if we had to teach further. After that David taught the kids how to play the recorder. Elizabeth helped them get their fingers in the right place, or tried to anyway, but they just did their own thing and blew into it as hard as they could.

David's mom prepared and sent little baggies containing gifts for the kids. In them were these red balloons. All the girls blew them up and tucked them into their shirts pretending to be pregnant. One of the missionaries whom works with these kids was telling us how a lot of the girls at a very young age,
sometimes as young as 12, have babies and get married, because they don't have any education. Some of the men in the community will rape the young girls they find attractive and then tell the girl’s father that she had been used just so that she won’t be able to go back home to her family. Sick!

"Katerina, one of the missionaries who works with the Roma kids and teaches them music, told me that one of the boys used bad language towards her because of her skin color being darker than the rest of them which confused me because I'm basically the same color as they are. Brown!" says Elizabeth. Katerina told her that this kid was known to act out and cause trouble. Because society treats them so poorly, even within their own Roma community, they are looked down upon. Sometimes they find ways to put other people down. We were shocked by what we saw in Greece - people living in a garbage dump, no running water, no electricity, and no toilets. We take these things for granted at home.

It was nice to see how Dimitris and the other Christians had established relationships with the Roma people and kids. They had a small building that they used for church and worship services. It was strange to see a great mountain in the background, long grassy fields, and then slum like conditions with lots of trash all over the place. We picked up the dentist and her assistant who volunteered to do dental work at the gypsy camp.

**Day 5:** We went to church. We visited Dimitris’ church. “It was a great experience for me because I wanted to see the churches there and see how their worship is lead and the style of music they do,” says David. They sang lots of hymns and traditional music like we do at Calvary. We attended a second service at 7 p.m. that was very moving and touching.

**Day 6:** We had devotions at the refugee center in the early morning. We picked up gifts for refugee kids from Syria whom we would later visit. We had shoe box gifts for kids and managed to fill up maybe a dozen large trash bags with gift boxes for boys and girls up to the age of 12. These gifts were donated by people from Holland. We drove about an hour to Alexandria, Greece. We encountered some traffic as there was a city strike for train workers, so many people were driving on the roads. It was quite an adventure trying to drive with 4 cars following each other. “I got to ride with a few Romanian Christians. One gentleman was a German speaking Swiss man and the other from Transylvania. We had a good discussion on John Calvin and the health of the evangelical church in America and Romania,” says George.

We arrived at the refugee camp and it was quite different from the one in Berea. The trip and landscape there were fascinating. The countryside seemed to have different vegetation with golden looking grass fields, in contrast to the mountains and evergreen trees we saw in Berea and parts of Thessaloniki. The camp seemed to be a former military camp with some old buildings, a tiny basketball court, and soccer field made of concrete. This was run by the Greek government in conjunction with the UN. We were told not to interact with the women or even extend our hands for a handshake or maintain eye contact. Distribution of the gifts was quite an experience. At first there were just a dozen or so boys and girls. They didn’t speak English, just Arabic. Within a few minutes, it was a beehive of activity and kids appeared from thin air. Their mothers, too, appeared to ask for extra gifts for their kids. It was hard
keeping order and the women broke cultural norms by tapping on the men’s shoulders and speaking directly to the male members of the team. In no time, we ran out of gifts and it seemed the day ended prematurely. We weren’t able to take pictures of the refugees. It was quite a hot day and the camp was basic without any frills. George got the chance to color a book with a young Syrian boy who was happy to have received crayons, art paper, and much more in his gift box.

**Day 7:** The final day we went to the refugee center one last time. This time we had devotions there and split into groups before the refugee center opened. There was lots of traffic on the way so Dimitris took an alternative route. It was more scenic. We split into various groups to assist with specific tasks. There were refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Iraqi. Some Syrian refugees shared their stories of how they have made the journey to Greece after the war in Syria. We handed out clothing, food, and did their laundry. The refugees from Nepal had it rough, since they were the newest refugees. The Pakistanis took advantage of them.

David and Richard joined Pastor Alfonse in his table conversation with some 8 men. Hindus were very interested in the Gospel message, but Muslims were extremely hostile to the Gospel. At the end of the dialogue a couple of Muslims walked away, but we had the chance to pray with the rest. George had a separate table conversation with a few about Christ, while Elisabeth was working with the children.

What a great experience with a great group of individuals. It was a pleasure traveling with the group and getting to know each other. We prayed over the city and that the missionaries will stay strong and keep working because it is really making a difference in the lives of the refugees.

*Philippians 2:13 - for it is God who is working in you.*