



MINUTE FOR MISSION

International Peacemaker Visit Inspires Congregation to Help Syrian Refugee Family

At Ivyland Presbyterian Church, the visits of international peacemakers have informed the minds of members, inspired their hearts, and moved the congregation to action on behalf of people in need.

International peacemaker Rami Al Maqdasi, an Iraqi-born pastor, spoke at the suburban Philadelphia congregation in 2015, just as thousands of refugees were fleeing the Middle East. He gave the congregation a firsthand account of the hardships posed by displacement. When he was a child in the 1980s, the war between Iraq and Iran forced Rami's family to leave their hometown of Basra for eight years. When they moved home, Rami became heavily involved in the local Presbyterian church and sensed a call to ministry. He attended seminary in Cairo, where he painfully watched the tragedies befalling his native Iraq. After seminary, Rami went to Syria, where he got married, served among Iraqi refugees, and became pastor of a Presbyterian church.

In 2011, civil war erupted in Syria, and drones rained down bombs on the Syrian people. Kidnappings became commonplace, and innocent people fell victim to gunfire attacks. Heartbroken and in need of safety, Rami and his family fled to the Kurdish region of Iraq. During their 15 months there, Rami ministered to the thousands of hurting refugees. Rami and his family received refugee status from the United Nations in 2014 and settled in Buffalo, New York. He now serves as a pastor at First United Presbyterian Church of Dunkirk.

Not long after Rami's visit to Ivyland, a local agency called the congregation saying that a Syrian refugee family urgently needed a sponsor. Ivyland's pastor, Sarah Weisiger, says the congregation was ready to step up in large part because Rami had put a human face on the refugee crisis. "Other congregations in Philadelphia Presbytery joined in, as did the local ministerial association. We ended up with six congregations stepping up to help the refugees," Sarah shares. "It's been pretty darn awesome."

While Rami's visit spurred the congregation to action on the refugee issue, Sarah says two other international peacemakers have visited the congregation, and they also inspired and challenged its members.

"Every time a peacemaker has come to visit us, it has put a face on world Christianity," Sara explains. "It has really helped us broaden our perspective."

These international peacemakers' visits are made possible through our gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. Supported ministries proclaim Christ's peace by providing support for global partners working for peace in their context, educating and connecting US Presbyterians through the Peacemaking Program, and raising our voices in support through the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. Because 25% of the Offering is retained by our congregation for local ministries of peacemaking and witness, another 25% supports ministries at the mid council level, and 50% supports national initiatives like international peacemakers, the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is equipped in this work.

Your gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering help proclaim Christ's peace and make a difference for people like Rami, for congregations like Ivyland Presbyterian Church, and for other Presbyterians working for peace in places near and far.

Let Us Pray

God of peace, we pray for people who are suffering from the destructive effects of hate and violence. We give thanks for faithful servants who are seeking peace in Christ's name. May their witness inspire us to greater action for the sake of peace in our communities and around the world. **Amen.**