



2014 RHP Roundtable Summary

Set in the heart of the city of Berlin, 58 participants from 13 EU countries and one representative from Brazil met together for the 2014 RHP European roundtable centering on the theme “Important Resources for Building Refugee Ministries”. We represented full time workers with lots of experience in refugee ministries, lay leaders and people who are passionate to begin outreach to refugees, and refugees who shared compelling stories of how God raised up ministries to refugees, driven by refugees and often while still in refugee camps.

This year’s conference took place on the campus of the Stadsmission, and we interacted daily with various ministries going on in our midst. Whether it was benefitting from the morning chapel devotions with Stadsmission staff, or touring an apartment available for refugees or nightly walking past and praying for the line of people waiting to gain entrance to the homeless shelter as they sought refuge from Berlin’s harsh winter snow and freezing temperatures, it was easy to sense that vibrant and important ministry was happening in this city center.

As in previous years, the reports/updates from conference attendees were an important tool to inform each other about current demographics related to refugees and ministries in each of the EU countries that was represented. An entire day was dedicated to sharing resources. We looked at biblical examples of refugees and what is God’s desire for us as we welcome refugees in our midst. This sharing of resources went further from our biblical base to current trends: pamphlets and DVDs available in many languages, training materials for churches, language learning practices, and how to use the internet with links and data related to the current situation of refugees in our world.

Because we were in Germany, there was also a breakout session for German speakers, in order to facilitate sharing resources and material specific to the German speaking world (which included Austria). Presentations on church asylum and how this works in Germany, and also with a lawyer who addressed immigration issues and laws in Europe helped to give a broader understanding of how ministries can make a difference when resources within the government and judicial system have been exhausted or perhaps have failed to support the needs of the refugee.

A session on trauma intervention and counseling, including principles of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and grief associated with leaving home and family was an important tool that sparked many questions and an interest to know more among the conference attendees.

As our knowledge base increased from a biblical mandate to welcome the refugee in our midst, to practical resources for how to start a ministry or strengthen an existing ministry, it was the next best step to put our newly learned skills into practice. In the midst of freezing temperatures, several of us participated in an information session and a silent prayer vigil outside a local detention center for refugees. A life saving ring was laid on the ground in the middle of our circle of cold bodies. On the ring were the words “welcome on board”. As we listened to the Jesuit priest who was leading our service, we were then invited to hold onto the ring and pray for the injustice that often meets refugees as they come to the borders of Europe. Our time together was rounded out with ten minutes of silent prayer marching around the detention center walls.

Other important observations about this year’s roundtable:

1. This gathering continues to be an important place to share resources, to encourage and be likewise encouraged as we respond to God’s mandate to welcome the foreigner in our midst.
2. There was a networking among conference attendees not only for the ministries that we represent, but also networking on behalf of the refugees we know who might be displaced to another country in Europe.
3. There was an underlying sense of hope as we offer trauma intervention and debriefing to refugees.
4. We recognize that God is on the move with the people on the move. We also acknowledge how God is at work transforming lives among refugees in ways that we cannot see or even begin to imagine.

Mark your Calendars! The next RHP Roundtable meeting will take place in Malaga, Spain in the 1st week of February 2015. Be sure to check the RHP-europe website for upcoming details at: <https://sites.google.com/site/rhpeurope/welcome>.