



del & jeannie penner

INTEGRATING THE FOREIGNER,
ENCOURAGING THE CHURCH,
EQUIPPING THE NEXT GENERATION

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DEAR FRIENDS & FAMILY

In spite of a crazy and challenging year, our hearts are full of gratitude as we approach the end of 2020. We would like to share a few highlights with you.

STAYING CREATIVE IN THE MIDST OF CORONA

In mid-March, we had to shut down our weekly Café International because of the Coronavirus – which had been our main point of contact with many refugees in the city until then. This has been hard for everyone. The refugees keep asking us, “When are you going to open again? We miss it so much.” Meanwhile, our German volunteers are saying, “We miss these times together. When can we open our doors again?” Unfortunately, our answer has stayed the same over the past few months, “We simply don’t know.” Because the refugees are still learning the language and culture, and they only have very few German contacts, the pandemic has only increased their feeling of isolation and solitude.



A bike ride together is a great time to talk and get to know one another.

When it became clear the Coronavirus would not be going away anytime soon, we made a choice not to be too preoccupied with what we cannot do, and instead to be more creative within the limits of what we can do. First and foremost, we have made it our priority to connect with individuals personally or in small groups. This has meant communicating much more through digital messaging and video apps. We have also focused on visits in their homes or ours, or maybe having a coffee at a local café or ice cream parlor. Our in-person language classes have continued to take place, practicing social distancing and using facemasks, of course. Looking back at the past months, we have maintained good relationships on a smaller scale with those we already know well, but we have really missed building and strengthening new connections.



A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

Mohamed and Sihan are Kurdish Muslims who initially came to Café International because they were looking for someone to help them move their furniture. When Del did, Mohamed expressed his surprise that a Christian would get his hands dirty helping a Muslim. This act of kindness opened the door for a friendship. Over the last five years we have visited their family often, usually praying for them before we leave. Recently, their son needed kidney surgery. After two unsuccessful, painful operations, the whole family was scared and asked if we would come over and pray for them. There was a feeling of peace, but still no real breakthrough. That night, Mohamad had a dream. He saw a curtain, and a gentle voice behind the curtain told him not to be afraid, his son would be fine.

These brave young men all wanted to donate blood. It was their first time in Germany, so Del took them along and showed them how it's done!

Continue on back...





Shahin and Sahar received their acceptance to stay in Germany on their 7th wedding anniversary. Time to celebrate!

The next morning, his fear was gone. When he told his family about his dream, they began to feel a sense of calm as well. The surgery ended up being successful and their son was able to return home earlier than expected. Later, when Mohamad told me about his dream, I asked if he knew whose voice he had heard. He said no, he just knew it gave him peace. I told him that God sometimes spoke in dreams and visions in the Bible, telling people not to be afraid, and Jesus often told his followers to not fear. Since the surgery, they have attended several church services. They have not yet taken the step of following Jesus, but we feel this is part of their journey. Helping Muslims get to know Jesus is not a sprint, but rather a marathon. In working with Muslims, we need miracles! We would be grateful if you prayed with us for these kinds of miracles among our Muslim community.



Gere and his family from Eritrea were a meaningful witness for Christ in the paper.

INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Over the years, we have built a good relationship with our local newspaper, the Nahe-Zeitung. Recently, we were able to use this to give refugees in our city a new public voice. We emailed one of the reporters and suggested she publish a few interviews explaining what it feels like to be a foreigner in Idar-Oberstein. She said go for it!

WE INTERVIEWED THREE FAMILIES – ONE FROM SYRIA, ONE FROM SOMALIA AND ONE FROM ERITREA.

The story of the Eritrean family titled “Praying to God in an overcrowded boat” was especially touching. Gere and Eden are Eritrean Orthodox Christians and strong believers.



Ibrahim and his family told their story of how their lives have changed since their flight from Syria to Germany.

In the interview, Gere talks about his voyage across the Mediterranean in an overcrowded and dilapidated boat. 70% of the passengers on board were Christians and they sang and prayed in the midst of this dreadful situation. When their first son was born several years later, they named him Noah, as a reminder that just as God had saved Noah on a boat, God saved them on their own boat journey as well. Living as refugees in Germany, they decided to call their second son Joseph, who was blessed by God when he was a foreigner in Egypt. Needless to say, the resonance among readers was extremely positive. We are so happy to have discovered this new tool to improve dialogue and understanding between the different cultures in our city.



Maria, from Somalia, shared her experiences of what it was like coming to Germany alone, when she was just 16 years old.

IN CLOSING

We would like to thank you for your loyal and meaningful support over the years. These are without doubt strange and difficult times for so many of us. Now more than ever, we feel that we are part of a global team. Without you, we would not be able to do God’s work and help those in need the way we do here in Idar-Oberstein, Germany.

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