

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Many of us have heard or read reports of Texas Governor Abbott sending busloads of Refugee migrants to New York City, Washington DC and Chicago. When I heard that I thought, “What an anxious situation for those people! What do they have besides the clothes on their back? Do they know anyone where they are going? Who will welcome them? Where will they go and where will they sleep? How will they find relatives, friends or others to help them take the next step?” What an unnerving situation.

Well, there are other ways to deal with the influx of Refugees (though Governor Abbot has recently chosen to do things his way). Most border cities have religious or social service organizations that provide appropriate services for people immigrating to this country. One such border city is El Paso, Texas. A number of organizations there have processes to assist Refugees after they are admitted through ICE/Immigration and Customs Enforcement. One such organization is Annunciation House – welcoming and assisting Refugees for 40 years. Ruben Garcia is the Director of Annunciation House. Some of us from Kansas City have worked with Ruben and Annunciation House over the years. Ruben is a native of El Paso and a Rockhurst U grad. Last week Ruben sent me an email about the changing conditions at the border. He wrote...

“Thank you Ross for sharing the reflection of Chris DiStasio. [Chris, then 16 years old, was a volunteer at the border in 1988.] It's wonderful to read that the spirit of the border reality is alive and well even after all of these years. All of these experiences are formative and part of the ongoing living gospel that continues to be written by the faith of those convicted by the presence of Jesus in the lives of the poor.

“I hope that you are doing well and continuing with your ministry. I want to put an idea out for you. All of these years we have been trying to recruit volunteers to come to the border to help in the work of hospitality. Because we have had a very hard time recruiting people to come down, we want to send the refugees to cities in the interior. You've no doubt read about Governor Abbott sending charter buses to New York, D.C. and now Chicago. He's doing that without coordination and for political reasons.

“We want to send charter buses filled with refugees to faith communities in cities in the interior of the country. The idea is that in the same way that Annunciation House receives refugees here on the border, faith communities in the interior would do the same. A charter bus with 50+ refugees would arrive. The faith community would have to be ready with a venue where cots could be placed and the refugees would sleep there. Meals would have to be arranged, hygiene items, used clothing, etc., would be collected. Volunteers would have to do simple intakes and then call the refugees' family members or friends who are able to receive them and who could purchase bus or plane tickets to get them there. These refugees would stay with you from 24 to 72 hours before moving on.

“There would also be some refugees that don't have a sponsor and who would need longer term hospitality. The hospitality site would need to identify places that could offer longer term hospitality while the refugees look for work and then start looking for a place to rent on their own.

“It's a lot of work but it is also the living Gospel – “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” The stranger is standing at the door of the border. The knock on the door needs to be heard in Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Portland, Seattle, Boise, Richmond, and on and on and on

“Let me know what you think, Ruben”

Well, what do you think, St. James? There are many different needs connected with this ministry of hospitality. I am also making contact with other organizations and churches. Where do we/you fit in? You can leave your response at rossbeau@gmail.com. Thank you.