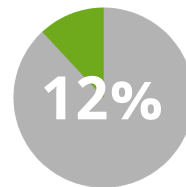


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## Small Congregations in Turkey Step Up in a Mighty Way to Help Syrian and Iraqi Refugees



LAURA & RICH FREEMAN



SUPPORT PLEDGED



EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND LIBERIA

*Laura and Rich Freeman are associate development workers appointed with IM and their nonprofit organization, Turkish Connections International. In this story, they discuss the refugee situation in Turkey and how some Turkish congregations are responding.*

The two young men were appalled by what they saw: multiple families jammed into makeshift housing on the roofs of crumbling apartment buildings. Three generations were packed tightly into lean-to shelters without running water or toilets and lacked the most basic supplies. Refik and Demokan, Turkish pastors and friends, had come in the name of Jesus to bring help to some of the thousands of Syrian refugees who had crowded into Turkish cities and villages in search of safety after ISIS terror drove them from homes.

Over two million refugees have flooded into Turkey, running from civil war in nearby Syria and Iraq. That number is projected to reach three million by the year's end. While the Turkish government has set up refugee camps in the rural southeastern region in order to help these terrified newcomers, conditions are difficult at best. Long-term needs such as jobs, permanent housing and education for children have been slow to be addressed, as policy is still being worked out to deal with the overwhelming shortages. Many refugees have slipped out of the camps to make their way toward Europe or the large Turkish cities farther west.

This dire situation has given Turkish believers like Refik and Demokan an opportunity to bring much more than a cup of water in Jesus' name. Moved by compassion and the love of Christ, they and their small, humble congregations have stepped up in a mighty way.

Refic and Demokan are evangelical church pastors in their home city, and they work together to run a Christian camp ministry. In addition, they have secular jobs to support their young families. In the midst of these busy schedules, these men feel God calling them to reach out to help the human flood. They started by leading their congregations in giving out of their few resources to help those in their own neighborhoods in Ankara and Istanbul.

Teams from the churches then began to fill truckloads of supplies for the long trek south to the refugee camps. Soon, a nonprofit foundation was formed to enlarge the work and seek other funding sources.

These faithful Turkish Christians have gained the trust of refugees and camp leadership alike, and they are now working with the blessing of once-wary government officials as they fill and deliver truckload after truckload to the camps. Refugees include Muslims, Christians, and members of minority sects such as the Yazidi who are reviled by those who follow fundamentalist Islam and who suffered unspeakable treatment at the hands of ISIS in their home villages. The Turkish Christians have brought tender care to all of these people, regardless of religion. They are also helping Syrian and Iraqi Christians to start church services and settle into more permanent housing.

As Refic and Demokan visited the rooftop refugee village, Muslim mothers gratefully accepted food, clothing, diapers and baby formula. Fathers were helped to set up water tanks for showers and toilets. Children who had been robbed of their childhood were given toys that brought light to their sad eyes, and they happily joined impromptu soccer games with team members. Each family was offered an Arabic language Bible, which nearly all accepted.

Demokan, Refik and the team of believers left that day knowing they had made life a bit better for these precious ones, breaking down barriers and opening hearts to one day receive the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ.

