

The Bridge



Friends of
American Church in Paris
American Church in Berlin
Vienna Community Church

Spring 2023

LETTER FROM AFCU PRESIDENT



From the President's Desk:

Spring is upon us, bringing renewal and new growth. Even AFCU, a very old organization (founded in 1848), has decided to spring forth

with a new look and logo! We were very fortunate to have a group of Senior Business Students from Calvin University in Grand Rapids, MI work with us, under the supervision of Professor Rachel Hammond. They developed a communication strategy for the future and a new look which is being trialed in this issue of the Bridge. Why is it important? Good and clear communication is essential to accomplish AFCU's mission of serving faith-based Christian communities in Europe by providing assistance and financial support to ecumenical, English-speaking, interdenominational churches. We are so pleased to be able to support our 3 churches and thus help them accomplish their missions. The churches are unsung heroes, and the goal is to showcase their work to as many people as possible. The work with refugees that you are hearing about in this issue, is an excellent example. Please feel free to highlight the work of the churches by passing the Bridge onto families and friends. We are also happy to add family and friends to our email distribution lists.

If you are interested in helping AFCU accomplish its mission, please let me know at afcupresident@afcupbridge.org.

Kris Richardson Smith, President AFCU

Thank you, Calvin College Students!

A team of Senior Business Students from Calvin University in Grand Rapids, MI, enthusiastically took up the challenge of re-imagining how the AFCU could present itself to our existing and future supporters by evaluating and proposing new ideas for the AFCU logo, tag line and Communications strategy.

This new graphic expression is simple and easily identifiable. Its friendly and modern look represents the AFCU as credible and contemporary organization, with respect to our long tradition and history. We warmly thank the student team -- Alyssa Lester, Joshua Kingma, Solomon Kim, Jessie Reith, Daniel Kwik, and Professor Rachel Hammond -- for their effort and enthusiasm, which inspired many Board Members!

Jon Voskul, AFCU Board

From the Editor

As I take over as the major editor of The Bridge, I want to thank all those that worked on it in the past. My thanks also to Russ

McNaughton, Ardith Meier and Jody Smith, who have provided much of the work of editing and publishing. This newsletter is an important way to connect all of us who love these churches and their rich ministry work in Europe. This issue of The Bridge focuses on their mission with refugees – even more crucial with the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine.

Please share these stories with your current church and support these ministries in your prayers.

**Rev. Dr. Tina Blair, AFCU Board,
Bridge Editor**



AMERICAN CHURCH IN PARIS

HELPING REFUGEES IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS



“Is this your wife?” I was asked, as he pointed to Patricia. I had just met the man in the church lobby; we were about to file downstairs to the gymnasium, which serves as our overnight

homeless shelter in winter. We were a ragamuffin group of ten men and one woman. The latter had just been informed by her lawyer that, although, not born in France, she was indeed French due to having been married to a Frenchman. “You are French,” the lawyer had told her, “by relationship.”

In the gym, everyone assembled their beds in preparation for the night. Ali, from Somalia, knew the ropes better than the others as this was his second season at our church’s “100 Nights of Welcome” (NOW). He started his prayers facing Mecca, oblivious to his surroundings. When he finished, he got his evening snack and green tea upstairs. That’s when he asked me about Patricia. “Yes, indeed she is my wife, I responded. He smiled and declared, “Then she is my sister, since you are my brother.” It’s all about relationship. After a restless night on the gym floor, I awoke before my alarm rang. I opened my iPad and read of the horrible suicide bombing in Pakistan and thought about our Pakistani friends, now safe and doing well in Canada. They too are my family. At 6:45 my alarm rang and I played some music to gently wake this multicultural family from their slumbers.

After the mattresses and sheets were stowed away, I walked over to a Senegalese man I

had known from the first season of 100 NOW. He had told me in a text message that he needed new shoes. I agreed to find him size 45 and had them ready for him. Ali, who had finished his prayers, approached me and asked if I could find him a better coat. He showed me his current ripped coat, and we agreed it was time for a better look. I told him, “I have one at my home that will fit you nicely.” “Great,” he replied, I will go with you there.” Brothers.

On the way to my place, I learned that he had five children, had a degree as an English teacher, had moved to



Yemen to work, where a war landed him and his family in a squalid refugee camp, barely surviving. He told me how he got papers in France and about the red-tape to procure housing and resources. “I’ll be okay, I’m just waiting for my visa document and then I’ll work,” he assured me. At the moment, however, he was penniless.

I got out the new black coat and helped Ali put it on; it fit him perfectly. He was so pleased. “Wow, the ladies are really going to notice me now,” he joked. I loved the resilience and humor of this 52-year-old gentle Somalian brother in our living room, who trusted God and trusted me. Relationship is everything.

Peter DeWitt, Mission Engagement Committee chair, the American Church in Paris

AMERICAN CHURCH IN BERLIN

REFUGE-SEEKERS FINDING REFUGE AND GIVING JOY AND FRIENDSHIP



A year is an incredibly relative concept. It can be endless when waiting for something

desperately desired such as the end of a war. It can also seem incredibly short when you are striving toward a goal, such as learning a new language or building a new life in a foreign country after being forced to flee from your own.

February 24th was the one-year mark in the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the expansion of our ministry to refuge-seekers at American Church in Berlin. Welcoming and supporting people who have fled their countries in search of safety, freedom, and opportunity has been a part of ACB's DNA for decades. However this time those fleeing from war had come from a place which is only 16 hours away by car. This proximity has imputed "helping our neighbors" with a very literal meaning.

Because of the generosity of the wonderful people who have a place in their hearts for ACB and our ministry, especially many AFCU members and their friends and churches, ACB has been blessed to continue helping refuge seekers from many countries. Specified donations and grants, have also made it possible to provide support specifically for refuge-seekers from Ukraine.

We have stocked and re-stocked our special food pantry with everything from baby milk and diapers, to microwaveable

dinners, instant noodles, juice boxes, granola bars, pickles, and pretzels.

Beyond, helping people who are in transit, it has been our joy to "adopt" a Ukrainian family of refuge-seekers with six children, and to be able to help provide supplemental groceries, school supplies, Christmas gifts, and some warm winter clothing for them. Over this past year, the Ukrainian family of Katya and Sergey, have made huge heart prints at ACB.

Kumar Vasanth and I had the honor to be invited into their home for a special Ukrainian meal prepared by Katya, who is a cook by trade. We enjoyed wonderful fellowship in the small two-bedroom apartment, where mom, dad, the six kids, and the grandmother have lived for a year.

The family has expressed so much gratitude for the prayers, love, and tangible support they have received. They gifted the congregation to beautiful homemade cakes, one in the Ukrainian colors, for coffee hour.

We are now exploring working with another local congregation that provides temporary housing to up to 80 people, while refuge-seekers await their processing. They currently host 50 people and ACB want to support them.

We look forward to operating and supporting more activities as the weather gets warmer, and we are no longer on energy conservation mode across the country.

Denise Banks-Grasedyck, President of the Congregation, ACB

VIENNA COMMUNITY CHURCH

SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES – SMALL STEPS CREATE A BIG IMPRINT



Inas Ali Pire recently became an Austrian citizen, a major milestone in the 26-year-old Kurdish refugee's journey from war zone to a new life as a proud European.

At her side for nearly a decade – through marriage, birth of her daughter and a relative's death – have been members of the Vienna Community Church.

From her first moment at the VCC, "I see love there, humanity is there," she says now in German. "They really take care of a new person. From the first moment I was accepted."

Long-time VCC member Anne Storey met Inas, her parents and siblings when they were living six to a room at an Austrian refugee shelter after fleeing the Syrian civil war in 2013 and recruited Inas to help serve coffee at the VCC's after-worship fellowship. Inas says she never felt like an outsider for a moment, and the fact that she is a Muslim has never been an issue for anyone. "All the members are so welcoming," says Inas, now a sales assistant in a pharmacy and a part-time interpreter for asylum-seekers.

VCC members have long looked after refugees. "We live in a city where there are a lot of refugees," says Anne. "We respond as individuals and groups with cash, in-kind donations and moral support. We do a lot on a personal level."

Inas left her fellowship duties after she married her childhood sweetheart in 2018 and had a baby girl but made sure to provide a coffee hour replacement – her younger sister

Zainab. When their cousin was killed in a traffic accident in Austria early this year, VCC members collected money to help the extended family with the funeral in Syria and other expenses.

The church supports the Diakonie, the charity of Protestant Churches in Austria, and its home for recently arrived asylum-seekers. VCC members are also helping a teenaged Afghani refugee in his quest to study medicine.

Ukrainian refugees began arriving in Vienna within days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Individual members stepped forward with medicine and in-kind gifts, helped find housing for two Ukrainian families, furnished their new apartment, and helped them find their feet in a new country.

More formally, the VCC took up several collections for the World Central Kitchen, which has served over 200 million meals in Ukraine. Pastor Neil Parker has also been involved with the Disaster Ministry Programme at Wheaton College, which has provided Spiritual First Aid training to more than 200 clergy in Ukraine to help to deal with the spiritual and mental stress of living under siege.

"We try to offer continuous solidarity rather than one-time actions," says VCC Vice Moderator Mickela Moore. "We help where we can in the belief that many small steps create a big imprint."

Inas testifies to the success of that approach, as she rejoices in having a new homeland and celebrates "the joy of being a European who can live here as a woman in freedom and security."

**Kitty McKinsey, Moderator,
Pastor Neil Parker**

AFCU BOARD

CONNECTIONS HELPING REFUGEES



I met Anjlo and Lubna Ajmal, with daughter Mojza, Christian refugees who had fled Pakistan for France, shortly after their move to Claremont, CA, where I live. Such a sweet family, experiencing the extreme

culture shock of the difference between Paris and southern California. All of us who have gotten to know them have enjoyed being with them, experiencing Lubna's delicious Pakistani meals, and in turn sharing with them the beauties of southern California beaches and mountains.

I learned that as refugees in France, Anjlo had become very involved at the American Church in Paris, did some graduate studies (in English), and became pastor of a small Punjabi church in the area. Under the guidance of Pastors Scott Herr and Tim Vance, he applied for Master of Divinity programs in the United States, to become ordained in the Presbyterian Church. Anjlo was accepted and began online studies at the Claremont School of Theology in California.

The family arrived in Claremont from Paris in early September, 2021, thanks to the support of ACP. With the help of Rev. Tim Vance and his family (now living in Santa Monica), they settled into the family housing at the Claremont School of Theology.

Imagine the transitions! From Pakistan to Paris, learning French, negotiating buses and metros, and then arriving in Southern California, where public transportation is virtually non-existent (Anjlo is disabled and cannot walk far), and Lubna's English ability is not very good. Over the last year and a half, however, they have really settled into their life and community. Anjlo has been working as the seminary intern at Claremont Presbyterian Church. Mojza is a happy second-grader and has made some good friends. She has shed her extreme shyness and now chatters away. Lubna started taking English lessons and then added a theology course. She also took driving lessons and has recently received her driver's license. They have purchased an old car thanks to help from the church and friends.

The challenges that lie ahead are daunting: continuing to procure financial support for tuition and living expenses, finding housing as Claremont School of Theology sells its campus, finding work as the internship ends.

When a call for help went out through the AFCU Board, Board member and ACP alumna, Jane Kendall, appealed to her home church, First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon, NJ. That church has now graciously awarded Anjlo a sizable tuition grant for his remaining semesters of study, which will be paid directly to the school.

Through the AFCU and our church alumni, connections extend from Europe to the United States to help refugees. Thank you to all who continue your support by sharing these stories, and by offering prayers and other means of assistance. This has been such a challenging year for these refugees, but God's call and their faith has sustained them in meeting the challenges with determination and hope.

Rev. Dr. Tina Blair, AFCU Board

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SUPPORTING THE AFCU AND THE THREE MEMBER CHURCHES

The American Church in Paris (ACP), the American Church in Berlin (ACB) and the Vienna Community Church (VCC) are ministering to diverse populations spiritually, culturally, and economically. The American & Foreign Christian Union (AFCU), established in 1848, provides Board guidance and economic support to these churches, and is thankful for our partnerships.

The AFCU is an IRS 501(c)(3) organization, which means that your donations are tax deductible for US tax purposes.

We welcome the supporters who want to impact the world through these vibrant ministries. If interested in donating, please join us by following the instructions below.

Four basic means are available to make contributions:

1) Donate Online using PayPal or your credit card account:

Go to the AFCU web site at <https://afcubebridge.org> and use the **DONATE** tab.

2) Donate directly from your bank using Zelle: Follow your bank's instructions for transferring funds with Zelle. Use the following email address to identify the AFCU: afcuinsec@afcubebridge.org

3) Mail your check contribution to:

American & Foreign Christian Union
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4) Donate gifts of stock: Contact the AFCU Treasurer at afcutreasurer@afcubebridge.org for transfer instructions.

If you wish to designate your donation to a specific ministry, please include that as additional information by including AFCU, ACP, ACB, or VCC in the memo or additional information line.

Your gifts are important and appreciated.

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