

*“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”*

Leviticus 19:33-34

## Welcoming the Refugee

In Uganda, the attitude toward refugees is to incorporate them into community life, such as schools and health care. Global Ministries’ partner, the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), visited Kiryandongo, Uganda, and experienced both the wonderful hospitality of the community and also the great strain on the local resources.

One of the greatest challenges is health care. The influx of refugees has overstretched facilities. The local health center is operating without the necessary infrastructure and many of the basic provisions or staff. Since there are more people who need care, the OAIC is working with a hospital in the capital city to arrange for doctors to assist with the medical needs in the area.

One event that helped fortify relationships was a Valentine’s Day party. I hoped that the Valentine’s Day party would be a time to be reminded that each person is cherished by God and their peers. In planning the party, some leaders from each organization believed that the teen abuse survivors of GWAVE were overwhelmed by their traumas and should work behind-the-scenes. However, I witnessed leadership abilities and saw that they were awaiting moments to share their gifts and passions with others.

In addition to the great needs in the refugee settlements, the environment is being strained. There is an increased demand for firewood used to cook and trees are cut down at an alarming rate. The OAIC “Tree for Life” program accompanies the community to replenish trees and to find alternative cooking sources. The OAIC works with the local government and organizations to plant trees and start tree nurseries. Work is also beginning in schools to install bio-digesters as a way of turning human waste into methane gas for cooking and electricity.

Our visit to the refugee settlement reminded us of the many biblical accounts of refugees. We were reminded of Abraham and the famine that was so great he had to flee to Africa where he lived as a refugee. Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus were refugees in Africa as they hid from the vindictive, ruthless Herod. The community of Kiryandongo, in spite of the strain, impressed us with their hospitality. They are living examples of the teaching throughout the bible reminding us how to treat the stranger and not oppress the sojourner but offer them hospitality. The OAIC is grateful for the community in Kiryandongo for being an example of how to live with those who find themselves as refugees in their land.

*Rev. Phyllis Byrd serves with the Organization of African Instituted Churches as the Director for the Just Communities Program. Her appointment is made possible by your gifts to Disciples Mission Fund, Our Church’s Wider Mission, and your special gifts.*



REV. PHYLLIS  
BYRD

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