

FAITH IN ACTION

Stories of migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples critical in solving forced migration

Stories are powerful. The stories of migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples can change public policy.

Rev. Matthew A. Laferty July 12, 2017



The Gospel is a retelling of the story (and Good News) of Jesus Christ.

We recall the handiwork of God in the Great Thanksgiving at the Eucharist, reminding ourselves that we are God's beloved and forgiven children. In worship, we invite people to give testimonies, telling how God has been working in their lives.

The church is in the story-telling business. We know well that our lives are shaped and reshaped, challenged, and even transformed in Christ through the sharing and hearing of our stories and those of others.

Participants from 30 countries from all the regions of the world gathered in June in Berlin, Germany for the Eighth International Consultation of the Churches Witnessing With Migrants. CWWM is a network of migrants, migrant-serving groups, and faith-based institutions. Together, they are “dedicated to the proposition that forced migration is a violation of human rights and a denial of the inherent dignity of migrants, refugees and all uprooted peoples. CWWM is committed to eliminating the conditions that created forced migration, especially the root causes and historic injustices that perpetuate such conditions.”

The network’s consultation occurred immediately before the 10th session of the United Nations-related Global Forum on Migration and Development in Berlin. The meeting’s participants produced a set of “**talking and doing points**,” which were used to advocate at the Civil Society Days segment of the GFMD.

The consultation’s theme was “No More Walls to Our Shared Humanity: Telling and Claiming Our Migrant and Refugee Stories, Deploying Them for Transformative Action.” From the outset of our meeting, we were reminded of the rich and deep scriptural tradition of welcoming migrants and refugees. In our opening worship, we heard about Jesus’ flight into Egypt as a refugee and the mandate: “do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)

The most moving moments of these meetings come from the sharing and claiming of stories. The stories are particularly moving because the consultations bring together people from diverse life experiences. Migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples who moved across continents in dangerous circumstances. Activists whose lives were threatened for organizing among migrants. Church leaders who are mobilizing faith communities to welcome migrants and refugees. Service workers who are initiating programs to provide support to vulnerable communities.

One of the strongest tools we have in our work for justice for migrants and refugees is storytelling.

While stories are informative, the stories shared by migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples, and those in ministry with these communities are told and retold to transform the public policy process. Often, migrants, refugees, and uprooted peoples, including stateless peoples, are squeezed out of international forums and

left behind in international policy planning that dramatically affects their lives. CWWM provides a platform to organize, coordinate, and reclaim these compelling stories.

That power of story to influence public policy is part of the reason why CWWM debuted its new resource, “Turning strangers into friends: Hospitality, mercy, justice” at the consultation.

The book is a collection of the statements made by CWWM. These statements were shaped and influenced by the stories, narratives and testimonies shared by participants at the CWWM consultations between 2008-2016.

Styled as a workbook, it has pages for the reader to write reflections and engage with the questions posed after each statement. (The Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, Church and Society’s assistant general secretary for United Nations and international affairs, is the editor of the collection and serves as one of the key CWWM leaders.)



Another platform to tell these stories and narratives was a panel discussion that brought CWWM speakers to advocate with UN-member state officials on the theme, “People on the move: Churches and civil society in international negotiations on migration and development.”

Cosponsors of the event included CWWM, the German Roman Catholic social agency Misereor, and Brot für Die Welt|Protestant Development Service, which hosted the CWWM consultation.

Migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples must lead the international community in crafting just, durable, and sustainable policies and our stories are essential to transforming the processes and the policies. The Book of Resolutions reminds us, “Christian community at its best not only welcomes and embraces migrants, but can

be led by them toward clearer understandings of justice and hospitality.” ([Book of Resolutions, 6028](#))

To learn more visit:

- [CWWM](#)
- [Global Forum on Migrants and Development](#)
- [Faith and Facts Card on Global Migration and Refugees](#)

The Reverend Matthew A. Laferty is ordained in The United Methodist Church, appointed as a missionary for migrant ministry in Europe. He currently serves as the pastor of the English-speaking United Methodist Church in Vienna, Austria. Laferty also is a member of the denomination-wide Committee on Faith and Order and represents Church and Society as alternate representative at the United Nations Office in Vienna.