



RCA Global Mission

2020 Year in Review



JJ TenClay
Refugee Ministries Coordinator

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Grace and peace to you. It's hard to believe that Tim and I began our formal post-seminary ministry in service to God and the RCA 20 years ago. This include six years of service with RCA Global Mission. It is an honor and a privilege that I have been able to continue serving in this ministry after returning to the U.S. from our time in Italy, and I am humbled to continue to bring the good news of the gospel to refugees and displaced people worldwide.

I will recap my year chronologically, considering the changes and challenges COVID-19 has brought this year.

The year started with a bang in January when I attended the RCA Global Mission 2020 Conference in Florida. I participated as a guest speaker and a workshop facilitator, where I shared with over 400 guests from different parts of the RCA about my ongoing work with refugees and displaced people. I shared how I believe God is calling churches in North America (including those in the RCA) to care for refugees and displaced people as well. It was an amazing time to connect with supporters, church leaders, staff, and other RCA missionaries. At the conference, I launched a new migration storytelling project—this project collects stories from both people who have a personal migration story to tell AND those who have been blessed by someone with a migration background. This project serves as a way of connecting individuals and churches with people who migrate (including refugees) and our God who calls us to care for the stranger, the foreigner, the sojourner, etc. I truly believe many of you have stories worth telling, so please contact me to learn more about this project.



In February, I launched a new social media project, the #RCALoveYourNeighbor project. We often focus on romantic love (especially in February) or the love of family and friends, but do we focus enough, as Christians, on how God calls us to love our neighbors? Do we include our neighbors who are immigrants, migrant workers, refugees or former refugees, international students, etc.? For this project, people are encouraged to share a photo or a quick story on social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) demonstrating an act of love or kindness towards their neighbor with a migration background, including the hashtag

#RCALoveYourNeighbor. Will you join me in the #RCALoveYourNeighbor challenge?

In March, you helped me finish raising \$40,000 to rebuild a school and fund a trauma program for Yazidi children in Northern Iraq. The Yazidis were driven out of their community by the Islamic State six years ago, but now it is safe for them to return to their community. Providing a school and trauma care are two of the best ways to help this group of forcibly displaced people return home. Unfortunately, these projects were put on hold due to COVID-19, but hopefully, they will begin soon, as Partners Relief and Development (our partners for this project) have restarted services in Northern Iraq again recently.

I was also invited to be a guest speaker at a women's ministry conference hosted by the RCA Women's Transformation and Leadership Team in New York City. It was a wonderful time to connect with RCA women who are passionate about mission and ministry.

By the middle of March, Global Mission staff were put on travel restrictions due to COVID-19, so all of my work went online.

Tim and I have continued to stay in contact with those whom we served during our time in Italy. When COVID shutdowns began in Italy (before the U.S. shutdowns began), our partners contacted us to see if we'd be willing to provide some spiritual support to the Africans from our churches in Italy by hosting Sunday morning prayer and worship services. We were able to host these services for about two months. We continue to check in with our partners and have assured them that we are willing to do the same if Italy goes into another COVID lockdown. We also reached out to the Syrian refugees we worked with in Italy and we were able to send them care packages.

I was invited to be a guest speaker at a conference on refugee care at Princeton University in April, but the conference was canceled. I had also begun working with an RCA missionary who works with migrants and refugees in Europe to organize a group of interested people within the RCA to visit and see the work being done there and to talk about our experiences of serving churches made up of mostly migrants and refugees. This project was also canceled for 2020, but I hope to continue pursuing this opportunity in the future.

In the meantime, pastors, missionaries, and church leaders began contacting me due to concerns about how immigrants, refugees, international students, and migrant workers were being affected by the COVID-19 situation (in the United States and globally). I spent time consulting with them to try to find solutions related to these issues. This also led to me partnering with RCA Local Mission staff to host monthly Zoom conversations on *Loving Immigrants and Displaced People during a Global Pandemic* from April to August. These conversations were well-received by those who attended, and we had people attend from the RCA, the Christian Reformed Church, as well as other denominations.



In June, the RCA committed to highlighting World Refugee Sunday throughout the denomination. However, since many churches were not worshipping in person in June, we scaled down the promotion of this event. I created a World Refugee Sunday toolkit that churches could use if they still decided to observe World Refugee Sunday. We raised a few thousand dollars for the Refugee Care Fund from churches who decided to participate.



In June, I began researching my next fundraising project to provide care for refugees and displaced people globally. I am currently working with ecumenical partners in both Lebanon and Greece. Lebanon and Greece host a large number of refugees and displaced people. Both have had recent tragedies that have made it more difficult to care for people, including refugees (an explosion in Beirut and a refugee camp that burned to the ground in Greece). I hope that the RCA will support programs in both countries, but I am waiting for more information from our partners in Lebanon and Greece.

I continue to serve as a resource for all levels of the RCA regarding global migration and displacement. Before COVID restrictions, this often meant traveling to meet with people in person, but since March, this means joining them via Zoom for worship services, Sunday school, prayer meetings, Bible or book studies, etc. as requested. I also continue to write articles, record videos, etc. when requested.

My work with Church World Service (the organization that runs the Crop Walk) and the Christian Reformed Church continues. I write articles or blog posts, record podcasts, or participate as a guest speaker for webinars with these partners to discuss issues about global migration and displaced people/refugees.

This fall, I launched a new project called the Theology of Migration project. In our world today, including in the church, we often talk about migration and caring for migrants, immigrants, refugees, etc. from a political standpoint, rather than a biblical one. Therefore, I am creating a new webpage for the RCA website that focuses on resources (created by people within the RCA) talking about what the Bible says about migration and caring for those who migrate. As Christians, I believe we have a responsibility, first and foremost, to God. We need to study what the Bible says about different topics and then work hard to live out what we believe God is calling us to do and who God is calling us to be. All while also living in a broken and hurting world. In our world today, over 80 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, and many will never be able to return. The numbers continue to grow every year due to war and violence, persecution, natural and manmade disasters, droughts, famines, etc. Less than one percent of refugees will ever be resettled to a country like the United States, so how might God be calling us to care for the other 99%? I have spent six-plus years listening to that call, and I am humbled to invite others to join me in responding to this call as well. Providing a resource page that focuses on issues of migration from a biblical perspective is one way to do this. I hope that this webpage will be launched in March-April 2021.

I want to take a moment to thank you for continuing to believe that God has called me to this work on behalf of RCA Global Mission. Thank you for joining me in this mission and ministry. It has been amazing to see individuals and congregations rise-up to show their care and support for refugees and displaced people! At the same time, my heart continues to be troubled because we also know there is so much more work to do. If you are interested in discerning how God may be calling you to care for refugees and people on the move—locally or globally—please know I am here and would be happy to serve you.

It truly is an honor to serve God and the RCA in mission and ministry, and it is my deep desire to continue doing so. Our entire family is incredibly grateful to you for your support. To God be the glory, forever and ever.



Grace and Peace,

JJ TenClay (with love from Tim, Sophia, and Petra)
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