



JJ TenClay - Worldwide

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it (John 1:5)

Friends, I am writing this update on January 6 (Epiphany), which is one of my favorite liturgical holidays. Why? Because it celebrates Jesus coming as the light of the world...a light that cannot be extinguished, no matter how dark things become.

In my work with refugees and displaced people, it is the light that I must focus on. 2022 proved to us—once again in an overwhelming way—that the forced displacement of people all over the world is not going away. It is increasing at an alarming rate, with fewer and fewer possibilities for displaced people to safely return home, or to be provided with a safe, legal, and compassionate pathway toward permanent refuge elsewhere.

Our faithful response to this darkness is to share the light.

Thanks to your partnership in this ministry, we were able to share the light of Christ with hundreds of refugees and displaced people.

Thanks to you, we raised the money needed to support the Rohingya Refugee Education Project for one full year. This project, run by our mission partners of Partners Relief & Development, currently provides free education, clothing, shoes, school supplies, food, and clean water for 600 Rohingya children in eight schools living in Myanmar and Bangladesh. It also provides local teachers with training, support, teaching materials, and stipends.



Asiya is one of these students. In 2017 the Myanmar military came to Asiya's village, where they killed many villagers, set fire to houses, and assaulted women and children. Asiya was able to flee with her mother and brother, walking for several days with no food or clean water until they reached the shore of a river. They stayed there for 10 days, unsure of where to go to find safety. Then, more violence erupted and they gave all of their

family jewelry to a man who helped them cross the river into Bangladesh by boat. They eventually made it to the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, where they have lived for the past five years.

Asiya was forced to drop out of school at age 10 because her mother couldn't afford the school fees and Asiya needed to work to support her family. Asiya says, "I always wanted to go back to school but didn't have the chance." Thanks to your support, she now has that opportunity! Asiya's favorite subject is English, and she is using her education to also help educate her neighbors and relatives.

The light shines in the darkness...

After raising the funds for the Rohingya Refugee Education Project, I turned my attention to the people of South Sudan, who have experienced more darkness than many of us can comprehend for far too long.

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having gained its independence from Sudan in 2011 after decades of violent conflict. Unfortunately, this independence did not stop the violence and horrific human rights abuses affecting the country and her people. Since 2013, more than 4 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Many have fled to Uganda and live in refugee camps where they continue to experience hunger, family separation, violence, persecution, and the lasting effects of profound and pervasive trauma. RCA mission partners (RECONCILE, International) and RCA missionaries (Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather) are committed to providing peace and reconciliation, social cohesion, and trauma care services for South Sudanese refugees living in Uganda, but they need additional funding to keep these services going. Therefore, RCA Global Mission is committed to raising \$85,000 (USD) to support these services. We announced the South Sudan Refugee Care Project for World Refugee Day in June 2022, and hope to have the \$85,000 raised by June 2023.

- I know it's one more "ask" amid so many requests for financial support, but will you join us in sharing the light with the people of South Sudan? If yes, contact me at jjtenclay@rca.org for more information.
- Will you pray for them, South Sudan, and their current host country of Uganda?
- Will you pray for RECONCILE, International and the Smith-Mather family as they continue to provide compassionate, Christ-like care for people who are ready to return home and be peacemakers in their beloved homeland?

If my pleas aren't convincing, perhaps this video by Nancy Smith-Mather will inspire you: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXKxLr9EYzg>; I know it inspires me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such amazing colleagues and mission partners.

The light shines in the darkness...



Besides focusing on large, international projects, 2022 presented me with numerous opportunities to connect with individuals and families in search of refuge (and the people who are so faithfully advocating on their behalf). It also presented many challenges as I worked with national and international partners to find safe, legal, pathways for

these individuals and families. Due to the sensitive nature of this ongoing work, I cannot share many details in this update, but I will share that the obstacles that arise in this type of work are numerous and discouraging. What looks like a clear path forward one day turns into a dead end the next.

- Will you join me in praying for safety, wisdom, and new paths to be cleared for these desperate individuals and families?

2022 also brought about many more opportunities to invite individuals and congregations in the United States and Canada to join me in providing hands-on care for people seeking refuge, especially for those fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine. As the United States has turned to private sponsorship models of resettlement for those seeking protection through temporary resettlement pathways, there is a need for individuals and congregations to step out in faith to support these resettlement efforts (including the need for sponsors). Church World Service (one of the national partners I work with most closely on issues related to resettlement) is looking for congregations to sponsor Ukrainians who wish to be resettled in the U.S. due to the war. CWS has developed a new program to facilitate and support this process. But, it's difficult to have these conversations with pastors, church leaders, and congregations. Often the invitation goes out and is ignored or answered with a quick no (although, there is much joy and celebration when the answer is yes!). And yes, not every individual or congregation is called to sponsorship, but if every individual and congregation participated in *one* opportunity to care for refugees or displaced people in 2023 (contact me if you'd like to discuss opportunities), we could, together, make a significant impact.

- In light of this increased need, will you join me in praying for more "yeses" this year?

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

I turn to the beginning of John every Epiphany, and I will continue to turn to these words again and again on the days when the darkness of the world feels almost overwhelming in this work of caring for refugees and displaced people.

Yes, there is much darkness in this world...

No, it is not going away...

Let's continue to shine the light together.

In Deep Gratitude,

JJ TenClay
Missionary and Refugee Ministries Coordinator
RCA Global Mission