



**August 2023**

### **The Summer of Yes!**

Dear Friends,

Friends, God has been doing some miraculous things this summer related to my work with refugees and displaced people around the world. The people of God have been stepping out in faith to join me in providing compassionate, Christ-like care for those seeking refuge.

So much so that I am calling this the Summer of Yes!

In this letter, I'm going to share one story of yes. But stay tuned, because I'll be sharing more stories of yes in upcoming Dear Friends letters.

#### **An Earthquake Survivor Finds Hospitality and Refuge in New Jersey**

In June, I received an email from Church World Service (CWS) with an urgent request to assist a 13-year-old Syrian girl who was found alive after being trapped in rubble from an earthquake. CWS was working diligently to resettle the girl with her aunt's family in New Jersey, while simultaneously working to receive approval for her two brothers to come to New Jersey so the siblings would not be separated. CWS needed help—they needed to build a support system for this girl, the aunt, her family, and her brothers. They needed to do so quickly or there was a risk that this resettlement plan would not be approved by the UNHCR and by authorities in Turkey and the United States. CWS contacted me, asking if I could find churches in New Jersey willing to help . . . but it was a Friday afternoon in June, on a holiday weekend, and we had to have a plan in place by Monday.

At the time, I didn't even know the girl's name, but I knew God was inviting me into a sacred space to love her and her family, and it was my responsibility to invite others to join me.

Rayen is a 13-year-old Syrian girl who lost her father due to the war in Syria. She and the rest of her family (mother and three brothers) were displaced and moved to Turkey, where they registered as refugees, waiting for the day they would be approved for refugee resettlement in another country. On February 6, a 7.8



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magnitude earthquake struck Syria and Turkey. Rayen, her mother, and her younger brother were trapped under six stories of rubble (her two older brothers had just left to visit an uncle in a nearby country outside of the earthquake zone earlier that week). Rayen was trapped under the rubble for six days, holding onto her little brother as he died in her arms. The earthquake also claimed her mother's life.

It's a miracle that Rayen's alive.

However, Rayen has experienced significant trauma and loss in her childhood years—trauma and loss that is unfathomable for so many of us. We needed to do everything we could to make sure she didn't lose the opportunity to live with her aunt, uncle, and cousins in New Jersey as well, or to be reunited with her surviving brothers.

As I mentioned before, it was a holiday weekend in the summer, and it would have been easy for church leaders and congregations to say no. But after working with the staff of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics and the clerks of the Classis of Greater Palisades and the Classis of Passaic Valley to share what little information I had with local churches and pastors, I began receiving phone calls, emails, and social media messages immediately. This continued throughout the weekend, and by Monday I had representatives from four RCA churches and two non-profit organizations who said yes to loving and supporting Rayen, her aunt's family, and her brothers!

Rayen is now living with her aunt, uncle, and cousins in New Jersey. You can read more about her story here: <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/2023/07/25/orphaned-in-turkey-earthquake-a-girl-gets-a-new-start-in-new-jersey/70439316007/>.

We are still waiting to see if her brothers will be granted permission to resettle in New Jersey. Will you join me in praying that they will receive a yes as well?

Will you join me in praising God for the work of CWS, and for all who answered my email, phone, and social media messages and said yes to Rayen and her family?

Thank you to all of you who support me through encouragement, prayer, and making sure I have the funding needed to continue to care for Rayen and so many other refugees and displaced people worldwide. If you'd like to learn more about this vital ministry, invite me to speak at your church, or support this work financially either through a one-time gift or pledge of ongoing, yearly support, please contact me at [jjtenclay@rca.org](mailto:jjtenclay@rca.org).

And stay tuned for more stories from the Summer of Yes!

Faithfully in Christ,

JJ TenClay