



**September 2023**

### **The Summer of Yes, Part IV**

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We are now to Part IV in a series of stories highlighting the ways the people of God showed up in bold and beautiful ways to care for refugees and displaced people this summer... so much so that I'm calling this the Summer of Yes! I encourage you to go back and read the first three stories in this series here: [Part I \(https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/TenClay-August-2023-PDF.docx.pdf\)](https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/TenClay-August-2023-PDF.docx.pdf), [Part II \(https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/TenClay-September-23-PDF.pdf\)](https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/TenClay-September-23-PDF.pdf), and [Part III \(https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TenClay-September-2023-part-3-PDF.pdf\)](https://www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TenClay-September-2023-part-3-PDF.pdf)

#### **The Fruit of Hospitality**

In August, I received a message from an RCA minister with a request to find someone willing to assist a young asylum seeker from Panama (I will call him "A" in this letter). A was flying to Newark, New Jersey, and needed someone to meet him at the airport and transport him to another nearby community. The request had already been shared with a woman in New Jersey who might be able to assist, but just in case she wasn't available, I was looped in to find another volunteer. When I heard the name of the person who had been contacted, I couldn't help but smile.

Melissa was part of a group of women who came to visit my family on a RCA's Women Transformation & Leadership trip to Sicily and Rome (Italy) in 2017. We began getting to know the women in this group before they came to Italy (as we scheduled several Zoom meetings to prepare them for their trip). We then had a shared experience of coming face-to-face with people who have experienced forced displacement, human trafficking, exploitation, modern-day slavery, and horrifying journeys to find refuge. We also created space to listen to their stories of not only trauma and loss but of hope and faith. We have continued to stay in touch with many of the women from the trip, including hosting periodic check-in Zoom meetings as we continue to reflect on how that shared experience in Italy continues to inform our faithful witness.

So, it was no surprise to me that when Melissa learned of A's need for a friendly face to meet him at the airport and drive him to his next destination, she joyfully stepped up. What DID surprise me was that she sent me a photo of her and A that she took after she dropped him off, and included this message about the experience:

*Would you like to receive these updates digitally? Please email Kelli at [kgilmore@rca.org](mailto:kgilmore@rca.org) to be added to the email list. You will receive more timely updates from the missionary you support and help us be good stewards of our resources.*

***“So happy to have been a link in the chain of his journey. And my ability to do this flows from your family’s hospitality in Sicily. Thank you again for that.”***

So often we don’t know what the impact of our mission and ministry will be. We prepare the soil, plant the seeds, tend the seedlings, and we hope and pray eventually for fruit.

Inviting people into this sacred space of caring for refugees and people on the move is one of the most challenging—and most joy-filled—parts of this ministry.

Thank you, Melissa, for saying yes to providing Christ-like hospitality for A.



*Melissa and A’s road trip*

### **A Birthday and Backpacks**

My children—Sophia and Petra—have continued their commitment to loving refugees since we returned to the United States. One way they are living out this commitment is by partnering with I-RISE (a non-profit organization, started by the Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey, that provides refugee resettlement services). Two women from the Reformed Church of Highland Park (Wendy and Danielle) also participated in the Women’s Transformation & Leadership trip to Italy with Melissa. Sophia and Petra reached out to Wendy (who works for I-RISE) to see how they could partner together.

And the idea of Sophia and Petra collecting backpacks and school supplies for newly resettled refugees was formed. Throughout the year, Sophia and Petra collect backpacks and school supplies, organize them, and deliver them to I-RISE as needed.

Last year, Pastor Kendra Van Houten contacted me to see if her congregation (Fair Street Reformed Church in Kingston, New York) could collect backpacks and school supplies for Sophia and Petra’s project, and we delivered a car full of supplies from Fair Street to I-RISE last summer.

This summer, Pastor Kendra celebrated her 50th birthday, and for her birthday, she challenged her congregation to donate 50 backpacks filled with school supplies for I-RISE.

Imagine our joy when Pastor Kendra shared that not only had they collected 50 backpacks filled with supplies, but exceeded their goal, collecting additional school supplies that wouldn’t fit in the backpacks, AND collecting additional money to support the work of I-RISE!



*Above left: Sophia & Pastor Kendra loading the vehicle with backpacks and supplies from Fair Street RCA*

*Above right: Sophia & Wendy organizing the backpacks and supplies at I-RISE*

*RCA Global Mission does not receive denominational assessments or covenant shares. We depend on the faithful generosity of churches and individuals.*

Thank you to Pastor Kendra and Fair Street Reformed Church for saying yes to I-RISE and the refugees they serve, and also saying yes to supporting Sophia and Petra as they continue to care for refugees.

Stay tuned for one final story from the Summer of Yes!

In faithful service,

JJ TenClay