JJ TenClay

## A glimpse at what your support made possible

Because of your support, a young Syrian man displaced by persecution and violent conflict TWICE found refuge and just graduated from seminary!

I was first introduced to Eliah in May 2022 by now retired missionary, Dr. Peter Ford. Peter shared that Eliah was a student at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon, but that as a Syrian refugee living in Lebanon, Eliah was not safe and needed a new place to seek refuge.

One of Eliah's goals was to study theology in English, and so after some time in prayer and discernment, I contacted Rev. Nathan Busker of Ponds Reformed Church in New Jersey, to see if he would like to explore resettling Eliah in his community, and his answer was "yes." Over the next two years, I worked with Eliah, Rev. Linda Macktaby (Eliah's mentor in Lebanon), Pastor Nathan, Ponds Reformed Church, the Classis of Passaic Valley, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary on a common goal of welcoming Eliah to New Jersey.

In April 2024, we hit two significant obstacles: 1) Eliah's initial U.S. visa application was denied, and 2) another uprising of anti-Syrian hate and violence occurred in Lebanon, threatening Eliah's safety once again.

*Eliah in Rome.*

After more prayer and discernment, I reached out to colleagues in Italy to see if Eliah could be resettled in Italy through the Humanitarian Corridors program of Mediterranean Hope. [As some of you may recall, my journey of becoming a missionary began when my family and I moved to Italy in 2014, and I worked with Mediterranean Hope and the Humanitarian Corridors program as they were both launched.]

In October 2024, Eliah arrived safely in Rome, Italy!

In 2025 Eliah continued to study theology online through the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, and I'm grateful to share the following update from Eliah:

***Today was our university graduation ceremony in Lebanon. Today I have finished four beautiful years of studying theology, four beautiful years with Jesus Christ and it was a wonderful journey that I have learned a lot in.***

If you or your church would like to congratulate Eliah on his graduation or encourage Eliah as he continues to adjust to life in Italy, I invite you to send a note or short video clip to me at jjtenclay@rca.org and I will share it with Eliah.

## Expanding Welcome for Refugees in Italy

*Mediterranean Hope community sponsorship team (Hannah pictured on the right).*

Thanks to the generosity and support of donors, we raised $50,000 to expand welcome for refugees in Italy!

Mediterranean Hope is a faith based non-profit organization founded by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (including the Waldensian Church) in 2014 as a response to the mass deaths of people fleeing their homes in various parts of Africa and the Middle East in search of refuge in Europe.

In 2014, the Central Mediterranean migration route from North Africa to Italy was named the deadliest migration route in the world. It is also known for some of the worst human rights abuses related to human trafficking and exploitation for people made vulnerable by forced displacement and migration.

Mediterranean Hope was created to bring international attention to this humanitarian crisis, to create safe, legal pathways to resettlement in Italy and throughout Europe, and to welcome people in search of refuge with dignity and compassion. By 2016, the humanitarian corridors program was established when Mediterranean Hope and other partners entered into an agreement with the Italian government to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. My family and I were blessed to welcome 14 of the 1,000 Syrians in Palermo, Sicily as part of this pilot program, and these newcomers became our neighbors, classmates to my children, and our friends. 8,000 refugees have been resettled in Italy through the humanitarian corridors program since 2014.

In 2024, I reached out to Hannah Kummer (RCA missionary who currently works with Mediterranean Hope in Rome) to see if we could work on a joint project to support the work of Mediterranean Hope for their 10th anniversary, and the Italy Empowerment Fund project was born.

Mediterranean Hope had just begun conversations about expanding the humanitarian corridors program by implementing a new community sponsorship program, which would allow individual churches and community groups in Italy to sponsor refugees for resettlement (similar to community sponsorship programs in Canada and the United States.) However, their community sponsorship model includes up to 18 months of post-resettlement support for refugees, therefore the overall cost to sponsor refugees through this program would be higher than similar programs in other countries. The money raised by the RCA Global Mission Italy Empowerment Fund will be used to provide Italian churches and sponsor groups who step out in faith to sponsor refugees from Sub Saharan Africa and Afghanistan with an empowerment grant to help them meet their sponsorship fundraising requirements.

In short, the Italy Empowerment Fund gives individuals and churches in the United States and Canada an opportunity to bless individuals and churches in Italy who step out in faith to welcome refugees. And, at a time when we see welcome for refugees decreasing around the world, we can support trusted mission partners as they expand welcome in Italy.

I'm grateful to announce that by the end of 2025, we met our goal of raising $50,000 for the Italy Empowerment Fund! Thanks be to God!

## Please Pray

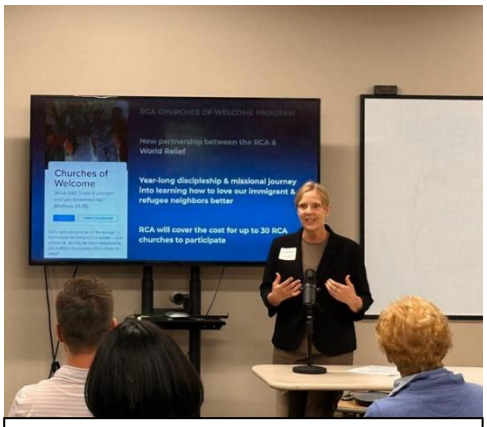
As we enter 2026, I ask you to join me in prayer for:

### Mediterranean Hope and their Refugee Community Sponsorship Project

Please join me in praying for the ongoing work of Mediterranean Hope and the refugee community sponsorship program. Pray:
1) that Italian churches and community groups will step out in faith to become sponsors,
2) that God will bless them as they prepare for sponsorship (and bless their sponsorship fundraising efforts), and
3) that every single person resettled in Italy through the humanitarian corridors program will be welcomed with Christ-like hospitality

### RCA Churches of Welcome Program

In 2025, Rev. Eddy Alemán asked me to coordinate a new partnership between the RCA and World Relief, and we are looking for up to 30 RCA churches to participate in the Churches of Welcome program, focused on learning more about God's love for immigrants and refugees and how we–as Christ followers–can better love our immigrant and refugee neighbors. Please pray:
1) that RCA churches will receive this invitation with open hearts and open minds,
2) that we will meet our goal of enrolling 30 RCA churches in the program, and
3) that God will bless the RCA Churches of Welcome churches in unexpected ways as they embark on this journey into biblical welcome for immigrants and refugees.




*Presenting the Churches of Welcome program at Local Mission 2025.*

[May I ask one additional favor? Will you please share information about the RCA Churches of Welcome program with your church, your classis, and your regional synod? Quite often pastors and middle assembly leaders are bombarded with information and it's easy for invitations such as this to be overlooked or discarded without a local champion bringing it to their attention. Also, non-RCA churches can participate in the Churches of Welcome program directly through World Relief (contact me if you'd like more information.)]