

FORWARD TOGETHER: HOPE-FILLED STORIES FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

A PODCAST SERIES BY WORLD RELIEF: EPISODE 4

Matt: Hello everyone. My name is Matthew Sorens. I'm the US Director of Church Mobilization and Advocacy at World Relief, and I'm joined today by Holly Andrews. Holly is the outreach director at Brook Lake Church in Federal Way Washington. She's been instrumental in launching barista training programs for refugees and immigrants at two churches in the Western Washington area. I'm eager to hear more from her about how these programs came to be and how she's seeing us churches in her area use the resources they have to express a Christlike welcome for their newest neighbors. Thanks so much for being here with me today, Holly.

Holly: Yes, thanks, Matthew. I'm grateful to join you in encouraging our listeners and seeing how God is moving through our local church.

Matt: Holly, can you briefly tell us a bit of your own story and how you are connected to World Relief?

Holly: World Relief was really instrumental in introducing me to those Seeking Refuge in Minneapolis in particular about 20 years ago. I was originally matched with a family from Somalia and spent some time tutoring the kids down the road. I became an adjunct professor at Bethel University which opened the door for me to go to Cambodia and teach a course with students and that's when I came across a unique training program for women who were rescued from trafficking. They were being trained in a cafe and I was so amazed at the dignity of the program and the ways that they invested in their spiritual care, even though the women were not as educated and lacked the opportunity to be literate. They came alongside them where they were and help them to succeed and they became managers and baristas and kick decorators and I thought, Wow, I really want to be a part of something like that. Soon I moved to Washington and started working for World Relief Western Washington. At the same time, I was in 10 units a church that had a full-on coffee shop and I thought, wow, this would be a really neat opportunity to partner together with Church and majorly. We started in 2012 and we've gone through about 25 training years.

Matt: Wow. I love how you've taken both what you got to see there in Cambodia and then recognized the resources available within your church and leveraged those to serve your neighbors. Can you tell me a little bit more about how you've seen that barista program help refugees and immigrants as they rebuild their lives in the US?

Holly: As you know, maybe our newcomers come with just incredible talents and skills and aspirations. There are a number of challenges to resettlement. They face the challenge of improving or learning English skills and understanding the culture and the expectations of the American workplace, and they can definitely feel like a stranger in their home. Even find it hard to be confident about the talents and skills actually have to offer. Being this church-based program, we really have the opportunity to connect with newcomers to become part of a community and be less of a stranger. Then we also

have the flexibility to meet training where they're at with their work, their work experience, or their English level. We've also seen trainees obtain employment through the cooperation of our world relief employment specialists. Church members have made lasting friendships and they get something that they can put on their resume they leave us with more confidence and economic potential and just feel like they have the skills that they can take into the workplace. Then they just are able to be unfolded into our church community. They've been able to receive prayer and attend special events and visit a small groups. That's really special, and I can't forget to mention something really important is that our participants have been so instrumental in helping the church to be better at following God's call for welcoming a stranger. They've clarified some misperceptions of the refugee community and they've shaped their lives and they equip us to be better at those relationships.

Matt: That's so encouraging to hear. Having been on staff for a while at World Relief where we obviously work with lots of local churches, we're now on staff at a local church, what would you say you see the role of the local church is in helping to create more welcoming communities for refugees and immigrants?

Holly: I can't help but think about the really early church, what that looked like, let me say that in Acts and people came together and were poring over God's word and fellowshiping together and being devoted to each other. It's just amazing to be able to see the potential of the local church if they enfold newcomers into this kind of really rich community. Practically though, I would say one of our roles is to build awareness, help us to encourage our church to understand who is out there, who our neighbors are, and discover who else is caring for those newcomers. Come alongside those who know the resettlement process like a World Relief agency, World Relief has been such a great partner for us to just know how best to come alongside and get that support.

I feel like God moves in our hearts and we're aware, it is really focusing on awareness and take time to pray, what does your specific church really have to offer? Then partner with the community after finding out who is caring, come alongside them. I would also say a unique place to partner might be with a church, possibly one of the ethnic churches in your area that's also enfolding newcomers. They might need some extra support, our church has a service for the Ukrainian community around us, I know that the community has definitely had a lot to manage.

You come alongside and offer some extra support within those ethnic churches, I think that can really be a great way to be involved too. I just see that the role of the local church depends on what are the assets that your church has, you can start with being a welcoming neighbor.

Matt: Do you have any other specific stories about how this work is making an impact either in general, through your church or relation to the barista program specifically?

Holly: Yes, the most recent training was really special because it's exactly what we wanted, the exact fit that we wanted for someone. This woman from Ukraine just came recently and she had been a barista in the Ukraine for five years. She had the skills but

she didn't quite feel confident and ready to take a job yet because she really felt like here English skills wasn't ready. World Relief helped her get a job and she was expressing, "I didn't really like that job, made me just feel tired and it didn't feel like I was using my skills."

After about six weeks in the training program, she applied for a job as a barista in our local cafe and got the position. Now, she's working and she's really, really happy and she said, "I'm so glad that I get to do what I really love to do." That was really special, is to really move someone into some really fulfilling work.

Matt: Thank you so much for sharing that story, it's so encouraging to hear the positive. I'm wondering though if you think back, has there ever been a time you doubted God or doubted the work He was doing through the church? If so, can you tell me about that time?

Holly: Yes, sure, as many people probably remember being in that awkward situation of the lockdown and during COVID in 2020. I was an outreach assistant at the time and it just really felt like there's so many needs that were coming up, with honorable people and especially our seniors, school-age kids, and our refugee population too. We were having a hard time connecting the dots, just felt like we kept running up against barriers, and it was easy to think, "Is God going to use us? This is our time to shine." Looking back, God was doing something in our hearts. I think He was moving us, and especially I could see in myself personally, it was a time to be reshaped and rebuilt and just really see what is really important. What seemed to arise was community is so important. I really desire that for people now. I also do see that it was so valuable to have that deep security in Christ and just have that new perspective of what it means to hope and trust in God.

Matt: That's so great, thank you for sharing that. I wonder if you could tell me what you would say to someone who is maybe feeling discouraged or even ready to give up on the church today?

Holly: I would say it's okay to feel unsettled. It's okay if you have those feelings of disappointment that maybe the church isn't meeting expectations. That means it's also okay to expect more. It helps to remember that the church is more than just the walls that host a weekly gathering. It's Jesus' followers living as disciples.

When followers of Jesus seek God's word and seek to live it out, there's going to naturally be transformation in their lives and those around us and God will never stop working. I believe you will honor the one who takes that step of faith and ask the Lord to make them an instrument in his hands.

He says, and the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, so he won't waste the willing laborer. We can be encouraged when he says his eyes run to and fro over all the earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are fully devoted to him.

Matt: One relief we've been talking a lot about what it means to move forward together as one body. As you know having worked here, we're a very diverse organization with

lots of different Christian expressions rolled into one. It feels important for us to explore that question. My question for you would be, how can the church as a unified body move forward together?

Holly: I would say embrace the differences and see them as strengths. Diversity can lead to greater outcomes. Brookelake has been involved in an organization called We Love Our City and it's comprised of churches and agencies. Recently, I was asked by our middle school that we provide some support to, it's right next to our church and they said, "Could you provide a welcome back barbecue?" It was a last-minute request.

They said there's going to be about 700 students and their families coming through and I felt, wow. Through this partnership with We Love Our City and the area churches banding together, we have plenty of volunteers representing four different churches and even our local veterans center. We were able to welcome these students and family members. It just makes a big vision come true when you're able to partner and embrace the diversity across your community and we came together. People, I believe, do really appreciate the opportunity to be the body of Christ working together in cooperative efforts.

People who witness that really see a genuineness and really see this principle lived out in Psalms that says how good and pleasant it is when God's people dwell in unity.

Matt: Thank you so much, Holly. As we end our time, I wondered if you'd say a prayer over our time and over all those who are listening today?

Holly: Yes, absolutely. God, thank you for your beautiful design of the church and as people gather together to seek you, to worship you and spur one another on towards a faithful walk and spill into the lives of others Lord, and I just pray you can encourage each listener Lord, may be the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may have abound in hope. Amen.

[FORWARD TOGETHER](#)