

World Communion Sunday
Messages by Abeba Germay and Lynn Thompson
Peace United Church of Christ
October 4, 2015

MESSAGE 1:

Good morning everybody. My name is Abeba. I lived in a refugee camp in Eritrea for seven years. In the refugee camp, I worked as a child care teacher. Lots of people from Eritrea were forced into the military as young as 18 years old. It was a very hard life in the refugee camp, but there was no other choice. I married my husband in the refugee camp. I had my first daughter, Abigail, in the refugee camp. Seven years later I moved to the United States in 2011. I was pregnant with my second daughter, Galiela, and I was taking classes at New Arrivals Institute, then I had my daughter on December 29, 2011. I continued taking classes at New Arrivals Institute. Now, I am continuing to take classes at New Arrivals Institute. I am also a teacher at New Arrivals Institute. Life for me is hard because I have not finished with my classes, so I cannot get a good paying job. Now I have my mother, so I live for my children. I work very hard.

In Eritrea, I only went to school until I was 15 years old. There is much more that I need to learn. My country is at war. I wanted to continue my education. I came to the United States. Living in the United States is hard because I cannot speak English that well, and am still not finished with my education, but I feel much safer in the United States than in Eritrea. My children will be able to have a future here than if we still lived in the camp in Eritrea.

My family lives all over the world—Israel, Norway, Libya, and some still live in Ethiopia in the refugee camp. It is very hard for me and my family to have my family so very far away. New Arrivals Institute has helped me and many other refugees and immigrants from other countries. Thank you.

Abeba Germay,
Teacher and Child Care Provider, New Arrivals Institute

MESSAGE 2:

I am Lynn Thompson, like I was introduced. I want to tell you today that the New Arrivals Institute in our last fiscal year, most of the time we were here we served 439 adults and almost 150 children during the year. That means that Peace United Church of Christ served all of those people. I think that is remarkable. You have served (even if you were not here in body), and your faith and your beloved church building were able to serve those people, and I want you to know how appreciative I am personally but on behalf of those 600 people, I want you to know how appreciative they are. I think it's remarkable.

You heard a little bit of Abeba's story. Her story is similar to every single one of those people coming. The details might have been a little different about the country and their pathway, but it is generally that kind of story. Something forced them to leave. They couldn't stay for fear of death or persecution. They found their way to a camp. They lived in the camp for a while. I could have been years. They then found their way to our community.

I just want you to know how meaningful this is and what is happening with that. Also, I tell almost every single volunteer and intern I talk with and community partner about Peace Church because it's not enough to just say "Yes, you can use our building". When I called and when I was discussing the possibility with different churches, what we were looking for was not just a church that said "Yes, you can use our building", but a church that said "We welcome you. We want you to come".

As has been my experience in the last year, and as is obvious from this entire service, Peace United Church of Christ is that kind of church, and I think it's fantastic. I am grateful for the representation of our beloved Christ. I hope you can have some small amount of pride in that, knowing that your church has reached out to people who are vulnerable and need help and couldn't get help any other way.

Maybe you wonder, or maybe you know about what we do all the time and what we do every day. People are coming here and we have over 100 adults and between about 20-50 children here each day. What are we doing? The mission of the New Arrivals Institute is helping refugees and immigrants to reach self-sufficiency through education. The key words are self-sufficiency and education. Through everything that we do, we are trying to help them help themselves, like that saying when you teach someone to fish. You are helping them for a lifetime. That is really what we are doing. We don't give out money. We just try to help through education. So, obviously, one of the most important things is learning English. You can't be self-sufficient if you don't know the language of this country, so we are helping people learn English.

We have a lot of other things. We have employment readiness classes. You can't be self-sufficient if you can't get a job and keep the job, so we are helping people learn how to get a job—those people who are, perhaps, from the developing world and aren't sure about how to do that here.

We have a congregational nurse who comes two days a week. You might know that already. This is funded through the Cone Health Foundation. This is an enormous help—not only with health education, but she sees client, so if they don't have Medicaid and they don't have insurance, there is someone they can go to and get information about that.

As you know, we have a childcare program. That was originally started because mothers were not coming to learn English. They had children. This is an incredibly unique part of our program. There is nothing else like it in the country that has free child care while they learn English and partake of the other services.

We have citizenship classes because, after five years, our students and clients have the opportunity to become a citizen, and they need help learning about that.

We have an emergency food pantry. Occasionally people will come and say "I have no food. I have no food stamps". We can give him a little bit of rice and beans while giving them a list of food pantries.

Another thing that happens in our program is that there is a sense of community. There are people from Congo, from Eritrea, from Ethiopia, from Burma, from Iraq and Syria, from Afghanistan, from Sudan and a few other countries, but they are all together learning English and having children in a program, and there is quite a sense of community among them which I have no doubt is an enormous help as they are attempting to make a life in this very different culture.

I want you to know how much we appreciate it, how much our clients appreciate it, and if you ever have any questions or you see me in the hallway, please stop me and let me answer your questions or do anything that I can to help. Thank you.

Lynn Thompson,
Outreach Director, New Arrivals Institute