

Mission Trip to Greece

January 30 - February 9, 2016

Ken Brink's Report to his Prayer Team

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Day 1 – February 1, 2016

Safe and Well in Athens

Dear Prayer Team,

Greetings from Athens! Our team arrived safely on Sunday. Flights went very smoothly and we got here without a hitch. One treat was flying the A380 from Houston to Frankfurt. Very comfortable plane!

We are staying at the [Hellenic Scripture Union](#)¹ in a place arranged by our hosts Operational Mobilization (OM). OM has a missionary work in Greece, originally started to minister to the Greek people but which quickly became caught up in the refugee situation.

To give you some idea of how diverse the experience has been... We received a briefing on our schedule last night from an OM team member who is from the Netherlands and were later joined by the Greek wife of the OM team leader in Greece, who is from Papua New Guinea. We are staying with some German college students who are also on a mission here, and were joined last night by a couple from Switzerland who came to learn more about OM's work in Greece and who are going back to Switzerland to recruit Swiss people to come serve here.

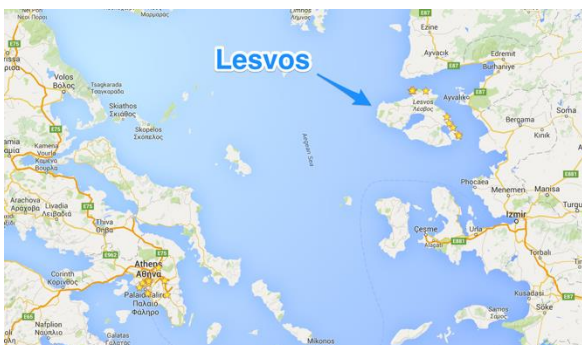


Judith - OM Staffer from the Netherlands

Our team has gelled very well despite barely knowing one another. It has been amazing to hear their stories. Last night I had the opportunity to tell them all about how you are supporting me in prayer and how I have been overwhelmed by the support you are giving me. You guys are fantastic, and your prayers are making such a difference.

Yesterday, we were asked to pack 4,000 sanitary packs to hand out to refugees, consisting of soap, shampoo, shaving kits, combs, wipes, tissues, band aids, etc. It was a production line type of experience. What was sobering was that each pack we put together represented one refugee. As we packed for hours on end, I was struck by the sheer scale of the crisis we were helping to address. And we were nowhere near finished by the end of the day. Today I will be going to Victoria Square in downtown Athens to hand out the packs.

A couple of our church staff who are also on the team had the



¹ Click to see [street view](#)

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opportunity to visit **Lesvos** (see map) before joining us in Athens. They came back with some interesting stories and pictures. There had been a ferry strike and refugees arriving on the island were piling up in camps which were not designed to handle that many people. Thankfully the ferry strike was resolved so the bottleneck of refugees was relieved and many continued on the 12 hour ferry ride to Athens. We are expecting to see a lot of refugees in town today and will be greeting them as they arrive on the ferries first thing in the morning later this week.

I'll have to sign off now as our bus to Victoria Square is leaving in a few minutes. More to come. Keep those prayers coming.

Love and blessings

Day 2 – February 2, 2016

It's Complicated

Dear Prayer Team,

Well it was a very long night last night. I survived on only a couple of hours of sleep and am trying to stay up awhile longer to get with the time zone a bit better. Gotta love that jet lag! Pray that I am sleeping by the time you read this!

We went to [Victoria Square](#) in the middle of town today. I have to say that the experience was hard. It felt awkward trying to approach people to initiate conversation, knowing that language was going to be a challenge. Although there were a few families in the square, by and large there were a lot of single men around. Many were from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, even Algeria. I did not meet a single Syrian funny enough. A group of guys from Pakistan had arrived 2 days ago after a 6 month walk through Iran, through Turkey before getting on a boat to one of the Greek Islands. They were mostly in the 18-20 year old range. They are now in Greece looking for work, but have no place to stay, and with a 25% unemployment rate and their illegal status it is not likely they will find much. They also told us that they were not allowed into the refugee camp because they are Pakistani. I learned that there is a difference between a refugee and a migrant. A refugee is fleeing persecution or war (Syrians, Afghani, Iraqis), but a migrant is someone who has come looking for a better life economically. Migrants are not wanted. I honestly don't know what these guys are going to do.

I was standing in the Square with the Dutch woman from Operation Mobilization that I told you about in my previous note when a Greek man approached us. He asked us where we were from. When Judith told him she was from Holland, he took off on a tirade about how disappointed he was in her country for not letting refugees in (untrue – the Netherlands does allow refugees in 8, but limits the number). He told her that she should not be in Athens handing out toothpaste to refugees, but to go back to her

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country and protest her government for not letting them in. He then praised the Americans for trying to help out Greece, but I don't think he knew how few refugees the U.S. has allowed in. Clearly this crisis is very negatively impacting Greece at a time when they have their own serious problems to deal with. Please lift up Greece and the Greek people in your prayers. They really need the support. By comparison, the Germans seem to welcome a virtually unlimited number of refugees. I asked one of the German students with us why that was. She said that with Germany's history, they find it very difficult to refuse anyone who is in trouble. She also mentioned that many of the wartime facilities built by the Americans and Russians are still around and are empty, and make good places for refugees to take shelter. It's so fascinating to learn about this.

The sanitary packing part of our mission was completed today. It was the thing that kept me on my feet and awake for much of the afternoon. Apparently our team is the first that has been able to complete 4,000 packs in one visit. You would have been proud of the teamwork today. Small things matter to the Lord.

I need your prayers for boldness as I found myself holding back today and being fearful to speak. Other more seasoned mission minded folks in our group seem to be able to do this with relative ease.

God bless you all. Thanks for your messages of encouragement. I'll try to write again as soon as I can.

Day 3 – February 3, 2016

A Day with Iranians

Dear Prayer Team,

Well today was an eye opener. On the schedule today was a visit from a group of Iranians who were associated with some American pastors that our team was in touch with in Athens. As we were praying this morning, I felt like the Lord was telling me "Ken, you need to put aside any thoughts you have about who an Iranian is." I have to admit that my thoughts of Iranians have been very influenced by the events of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 and all that has happened between our two countries since then, so I really did need to open myself to a different way of thinking and was glad to have had the advanced coaching.

The group that visited us today was comprised of Iranian Christians, seekers, and Muslims. Many of the Christians were new believers in the faith. It was very interesting to participate in a question and answer session led by one of the American pastors in the afternoon. They had questions like "Why did Jesus have to die by crucifixion and not hanging or some other way?", "Explain the 10



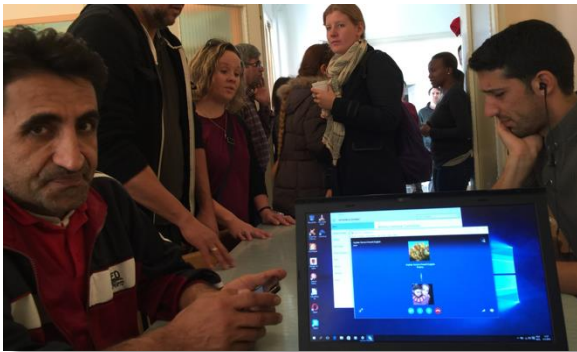
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commandments?", "Will Jesus come back and what will happen then?", and other questions about the virgin birth, what language Jesus spoke, and if the pastor believed in the Prophet Muhammed. What was interesting was to see what questions were on the minds of young believers and seekers, as I am rarely with this type of a group.

One of the guys told us he paid \$1400 for himself and \$700 for his daughter to be smuggled from Turkey to Greece. The smugglers packed 50 people into a dingy meant for something like 20 people and sent them on their way without a captain. They just pointed them in the direction of Greece and sent them off. They were told in advance that, as they approach the shore of Greece, they should puncture their



boat so that the Greek authorities could not send them back to Turkey. They did this before they reached shore, so that the man had to swim the last 20 meters to shore with his daughter.

I watched as two of our team members tried to connect by Skype to the Greek Department who handles applications from asylum seekers from Iran. There are only two days a week where this can be done, and there is no phone number to call or office to

visit. If you don't connect during the short window that's defined, tough luck. They were not able to get through today - the Skype call was never picked up. This is typical of frustrations faced by many asylum seekers. We were told of a man who persevered for 15 years in Greece before being granted asylum. If they leave for another country before their asylum is granted, they have to start the process all over again in whatever country they travel to.

In anticipation of having to provide their birthdate for the Skype interview, I was asked to help a few of the guys who do not know what their birthdate was in our Gregorian calendar. After an unsuccessful attempt trying to find someone in the group who knew how to do this, I was able to locate a website which does the conversion from the Persian calendar to the Gregorian calendar. A small contribution to the day, and one in a continuing series of learning opportunities.

Many of the Christians we met felt they had no choice but to leave Iran. One was a deserter from the army who was a border guard who was ordered to shoot people crossing into Iran on foot illegally. After he was ordered to shoot a woman believed to be a drug smuggler, he had enough and fled. Another became a Christian while running a hotel in the country of Georgia. On returning to Iran after the business failed, he found that he could no longer live there as a Christian.

At the end of the day one of the Iranians who did some interpreting for us asked us to pray for him. He is extremely homesick and is missing family members terribly. I think he spoke for a lot of the folks we met who were grateful to be in a land where they feel less oppressed but still found it very hard to be away from loved ones. I really feel for them. They have left much behind and would not have left unless they felt they had no other choice.

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At the beginning of the day, I spoke with one of the Swiss missionaries I mentioned in one of my earlier messages. He advised that the Swiss government had allowed 40,000 refugees in so far and that new refugees are arriving at a rate of 10,000 per month. If I understood him correctly, Switzerland has by law capped the total number at 150,000, so it won't take too long for the limit to be reached. The predominant group arriving in Switzerland is Eritreans. So as you can see it is not just the Syrians and Iranians that are on the move. Unfortunately immigrants to Switzerland are not integrating well and do not plan on putting down roots. I think they do not have plans to stay there forever so they bide their time. The positive thing I learned was how the many different Protestant churches in Switzerland are stepping up to provide support and assistance beyond the financial assistance that is typically provided by European governments.

So my conclusion after today was that Iranians as just ordinary people (duh), looking to have a better life, yet faced with challenging circumstances. I think they were grateful for the time with us, as we were for the time with them. People like the American couple Frank and Susie who were ministering to them are inspiring. They also miss home and expressed that they feel isolated at times. Yet they are doing work that they believe God has called them to do, without a lot of clarity about what will come of it. They don't know if the Iranians they are working with will be staying, moving on, or have to return to Iran if their application for asylum is not approved. Yet they are prepared to invest in them for as much time as God grants them. What a great attitude worth emulating. Make every interaction with anyone God brings you count.

Our plans for later in the week have been disrupted due to another [large scale strike](#). This means that the ferries will not be running again and we will not be able to meet the refugees who would have been arriving on the ferries on Friday morning. Please pray that alternative arrangements to be put in place will be just as valuable.

A little treat to top off the end of the day was a slice of baklava. It was literally dripping with honey. Highly recommended!

Hope you are enjoying these updates. I will continue to do my best to write daily. Tomorrow's edition will be A Day with Syrians.

Blessings and greetings from Athens.

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Day 4 – February 4, 2016

A Day with Syrians

Dear Prayer Team,

A Day with Syrians did not disappoint. It was a breakthrough day for me in that I overcame the reluctance to interact with people that I was feeling earlier this week.

As it usually does, the day started out in prayer before the arrival of our guests. I felt the Lord impressing upon me that the Syrians love their country and that they are devastated by what has happened to it. Their country is ancient. I reflected on how I would feel if my relatively young country were to completely fall apart. One of our team members shared the following drone video of Homs, the third largest city in the country (or at least it was at one time). It is unbelievable to see what has happened there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoRdCbDd50o>

The group that we hosted at the Hellenic Scripture Union today consisted of a mixed group of over 100 Christians and Muslims who are associated with a Syrian who is married to a Greek woman named Vula (think My Big Fat Greek Wedding: “What do you mean you don’t eat no meat? I make lamb.” Apologies to anyone who hasn’t seen the movie for this diversion). Apparently there were many more who wanted to visit with us that did not fit on the two coach buses that were arranged to bring them to where we were staying.



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My duties this morning were to "supervise" a group of Syrian kids who were playing on a playground in front of the center. Most of the time I was on duty on a merry go round, where I quickly learned how to say "Faster!" in Arabic. I also had time to push kids on a swing, including Anwar Malik who was a special needs boy. His parents kept apologizing in Arabic when they saw how much he was hanging on me. I told them he was beautiful to me. The kids were rambunctious (a grown-up word my Dad taught me when I was still a young kid), but they had so much fun.

I had a very interesting chat with a 25 year old Syrian Christian named Michael. His family has been Christian for generations and he reminded me that 10% of the Syrian population is Christian. Surprisingly, he mentioned that life under the Assad regime was safe for Christians, much safer than it is for them now. He is the first member of his family to have left Syria. They live in a coastal city called [Latakia](#) (called Laodicea in Biblical times) and his father was involved in the import/export business. The economy has ground to a halt so, even though Latakia is a port, there are no imports and no exports, so his father is in "forced retirement". Thankfully the area is relatively stable because it is Government controlled. Michael has been studying to get his Master's degree in Economics. He sees no prospects for life in Syria, and although his parents are not happy that he has left, they understand why. The most ominous thing he said is that for 5 years, the children of Syria have not been educated. If and when the situation does turn around and life returns to normal again, there will be a generation who has never learned how to contribute productively and meaningfully to society. What will Syria do then? He also expressed concern about Syrian Muslims being able to adapt to life in Germany. He referred to something called "the Islamic Mind" which looks at life in a certain way which is impossible to change. He talked about sheikhs from other Muslim countries who go to Germany to stir up fear in the hearts of Syrians Muslims who end up there. Something like "if you get too close to the Germans, they will try to convert you to Christianity". So their Islamic mind is hardened and they end up not assimilating. Pray for Christians in Germany to rise up and rely on God to overcome obstacles like Sheikhs who are in the way of a Godly outcome in the lives of these refugees.

Michael acted as my translator as I was with a group of men who were interested in asking me questions. I was able to share with them why I was here and a few of the things I had experienced. One man asked me if I would advise him whether I thought he should seek asylum in Lithuania or Germany. Not the sort of question I get every day. This is typical of situations we have faced numerous times this week. I felt so helpless to do anything that would be helpful, even though my desire to help is so great. It is as if God was teaching me "You're going to have to rely on me for this one." I told him that I would pray that God would bring him to a place where he could find safety, and will continue to lift him up.

I had another interesting chat with a 16 year old Syrian whose father has worked for an oil company in the United Arab Emirates since before he was born. Recently his father was told without any reason being given that his job was over and he was given one month's notice to leave the country. My new friend told me that he had never lived in Syria, and that to return there would have meant that he would be taken into the Syrian army on arrival, even at age 16. He educated me on the rules of the Common European Asylum System. Asylum seekers have the opportunity to apply for asylum in 8 countries. He

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gave me the list which went something like the Netherlands, Sweden, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Ireland, can't remember two, and Germany was dead last. He is hoping that they will be granted asylum in the Netherlands, where more than 50 family members already reside (he refers to the country fantastic). But there is no guarantee. 626,715 asylum applications were received in the EU during 2014. In 2006, there were under 200,000. Who knows how many there were in 2015.

At dinner (a night out at a Greek souvlaki house!), I sat next to a freelance writer who was developing content for a story in Books and Culture Magazine based on his discussions with "refugees and those who help them". Books and Culture is affiliated with Christianity Today Magazine. He is working his way backwards through the pipeline bringing refugees from Iran/Iraq/Syria to Northern Europe (Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany) and will be publishing a full article in the May/June edition of the magazine. A preview of what he will be writing about is below. He expressed the hope that Germany would somehow find a way to accommodate 1,000,000 refugees a year. He said something like "Germany is the key to it all". If the Germans suddenly stop accepting refugees, the pipeline, which is currently full of people, will end up dumping people into countries along the way who unlike Germany can't afford them and don't want them. Then there will be real chaos. Please pray against anything like this ever happening. I asked him what underpinned the Germans' willingness to accept so many refugees. His answer was "guilt over World War II" (same answer as I received from the German students I met earlier in the week) and a strong sense that it was the morally right thing to do (not specifically for religious reasons).²

When a Syrian wants to thank you sincerely, he puts his hand over his heart and lowers his eyes. I saw many such gestures today. It was heartwarming. Our attempts to show God's love to a hurting people seemed to be successful. Pray that I never forget this and that I take this attitude with me into life every day when I am back home.

I hope you don't mind that I am asking you to pray big things. I have been learning how to do this this week.

Day 5 – February 5, 2016

Ask The Lord of the Harvest to Send out Workers

Dear Prayer Team,

Luke 10:1-2 – *"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.""*

² [BOOKS AND CULTURE article](#) by Tim Stafford re visit to Germany and Greece

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Another Correct but not Biblically accurate saying shared by our Team Leader before our departure for Athens - *"Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not get bent out of shape."*

Today's Plan A was for us to get up at 4 AM and travel to the port of Piraeus in Athens to greet refugees who were expected to arrive on the ferries from Lesbos and other islands. As I mentioned in one of my earlier messages, our plans were disrupted due to a large scale strike. Plan B was for us to visit a refugee relief distribution facility to sort out clothes that had been donated but needed to be organized. The facility was in an area that was the location of the old Athens airport, which had been developed into the [Olympic village for the 2004 Summer Olympics](#). It is sad shadow of its former glory.

Also very nearby is a refugee camp which is used mainly to house single men. One of our team members managed to go inside the facility to use the rest room and described it as housing at least 1000 refugees, with appalling conditions including a large pool of urine on the floor. We were told that the facility is locked up from 7 PM to 9 AM. It is not a concentration camp but the description is probably not far off the reality. Buses run from Victoria Square, where I was earlier this week, to this camp, but the ones we saw left empty. Word is out about the conditions at this camp. The Federal Government of Greece runs the camp, but do not allow Christian organizations to visit to provide relief. Please pray for the conditions of this camp to be improved and for a drastic change in the situation faced by all of the refugees that stay there.

Plan B did not go well. The person who was to have met us and shown us what to do never arrived. We stood outside the building in a chilling wind for a long time. While our host was trying to track down the responsible person, a couple of our team members found their way into the building through another door that was unlocked and let the rest of us in. The facility was crammed with boxes that were full but had never been opened or properly sorted. Our host commented that in another section of the facility, clothes had been unpacked and organized and were ready for distribution to the nearby refugee camp or other locations, but the clothes were still sitting there after quite a number of days. With no work to do, a decision was made that we should try to get our bus back and go with Plan C, which I'll describe shortly. On my way out of the building, I saw a notice on the floor and picked it up. It said in English, Arabic, and French:

*"We hope for your safety and pray that you know security and stability.
The British People"*

This was likely included in one of the boxes of donated clothes that had previously been opened at the facility. I praised God that there are good-hearted people all over the world who have understood the plight of these people and are willing to donate of their abundance to help them. However, I wondered how they would feel if they knew that what they donated was sitting in a warehouse in Athens, so close to those who needed the assistance the most, but who did not receive it due to the disorganized way that the distribution is currently being handled. Please pray for an improvement in the efficiency of this operation so that the supply meets the need more quickly.

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Plan C was put into action, and all we knew at the time was that we would visit the [Piraeus port](#) to see how we could help. On arrival there, I was assigned to help a Greek volunteer named Ranya distribute sandwiches to refugees in one of the terminal buildings in the port, in a section right where the ferries from the islands arrive. Refugees are currently stranded in Piraeus, and we were told it was because the border to Macedonia was closed. I'm not sure if this was because of the strike or for some other reason. The people inside the terminal were badly in need of food. Where they are staying, there is no food to buy and we understand some had not eaten for 2 days. The woman we were with was so heartbroken that no one had come to help the refugees that she went to a local supermarket to buy bread, cheese and meat and make as many sandwiches as she could. I couldn't tell if she was affiliated with an organization or if she was just doing this as a concerned person out of the goodness of her heart. Either way, it was a godsend to the people in the terminal to whom we distributed the sandwiches. We also helped make milk for babies using baby formula Ranya had provided. When we initially arrived, the sight that greeted us was about 100 people mostly lying on blankets around the terminal building. Some were still and completely covered with blankets. There was very little life in the room initially, but as we handed out food, the room came more alive.



As we were finishing up the preparation of baby formula, the Greek police arrived with buses. All of the refugees were ordered to leave the room with a policeman yelling in English "Get on the bus!" Refugees did not know what was going on, why they were being asked to leave, or where they were going. The leader of the refugees in the room asked us in a combination of broken English and a gesture of crossing his wrists "Are they taking us to jail?" Ranya asked, but the police did not disclose where they were being taken. She was extremely upset with the police over their treatment of the refugees. We heard that there might be another refugee boat arriving and we speculated that they wanted to clear the room out to receive the next batch of refugees. And so the cycle of life in Piraeus continues. We were the only volunteers at this particular terminal.

As our time there came to an end with the departure of the refugees on buses, we walked back to another terminal in Piraeus where the rest of our team had gone in to serve. The situation there was even worse than the situation at the first terminal I described above. There were 400 or so refugees there, but also a number of other volunteers there as well (local Greek volunteers, Medics sans Frontiers, Jesuit Relief Services, Refugee Boat Foundation (from the Netherlands)). Our group did not plan to be there and were not expected, but we soon found a multitude of ways to be of service. One of the first things I did was to hand out digestive biscuits that were purchased with funds that we brought with us. I have to confess that it was a huge blessing to be able to see with my own eyes how donations

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made by people who care could be used to directly benefit the people who needed it the most, rather than having donations sit in a disorganized warehouse somewhere. Some of our team members experienced a bit of a mob scene compared to what I experienced in the first terminal, where the distribution of sandwiches was controlled by a refugee who had natural leadership ability and had stepped up to help. In contrast, this second terminal had no apparent leadership and people were just trying to grab what they could before the food was gone. I felt fine, but some of our members were quite uncomfortable.

A little later, I was asked to help with the distribution of clothing donations to people who needed them. I was told by a refugee what they wanted and had to go to a series of back rooms to try to find what they needed (correct shoe size, right sized winter jackets, etc. etc.). The refugee workers tried to bring some organization to it, but the people were so needy it didn't work. Members of our team had to physically guard the door to the back rooms.

People swarmed around me, each pulling on my sleeves saying "Mister, Mister" to try to get my attention and tell me what they needed. I did my best to hear and remember what they wanted, and find what was there in the back room that matched. Many times I couldn't find what was needed, but other times, I would just ask God to help me find things that weren't asked for that I might be able to give to someone who needed it. Sometimes before I could even get to the person who had asked me for help, others intercepted me and grabbed what I had in my hand. I always felt safe, but it was a bit of a strange situation as there were no authorities around in this public ferry terminal to help keep order.

While we were distributing clothes, volunteers prepared a meal of pasta, bread and oranges for the refugees, and it came time to distribute it. I was asked to form part of a human chain that prevented refugees from swarming the counter where the meals would be served and effectively funnel them into a single line that could be controlled. With a lot of prayer, the food distribution went very smoothly. During our team debrief tonight, members of our team who were helping with food preparation in the kitchen were told by the volunteer workers there that they were very worried about how the distribution would go. Apparently it was a big comfort to have us there helping to keep things under control.

Most of my time today was spent doing very practical things. I am glad to be able to do what I did, but a number of our team members had the opportunity to interact with the refugees, pray with them and in some cases evangelize. One of our team members lived in Yemen for 9 years and is fluent in Arabic, so she was able to get into some deep conversations. I seem to be filling the role of servant, while others have the blessing of direct interactions. I am amazed at the boldness that our team members are showing by offering to pray for refugees and other volunteer workers regardless of their faith. Even Muslims appreciate the love and care we have for them as expressed through prayer, and most will never refuse if we are bold enough to ask the simple question "Will you let me pray for you?" How easy

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a question is this for us to ask in more "normal" circumstances? I will be less reluctant about this when I get home.

I started out this report by quoting from Luke 10:2. One thing we started on the first day of our mission trip was to set our alarms to go off at 10:02 each day. This is a reminder for us to pray that God would send harvest workers to bring in the plenteous harvest that is out there ready to be brought in. If ever I saw just how true that verse is, it was today. Truly the laborers are few. One of the Greek relief workers who served with us today said that he has only had 5 hours of sleep in the last 3 days. There is just so much work to be done. I think our unexpected presence today was as much a blessing to the other volunteers as it was for the refugees. We must have done something right, because we have been invited back tomorrow morning and will be foregoing some of our planned sightseeing to help out again.

Please pray about the role you can play in bringing in the harvest God has prepared, whether here in Greece, at home where you live, or some other place God is calling you to. Then go out and harvest.

Not sure if you remember, but I asked you in an earlier message to pray that God would provide something just as valuable as a replacement for our cancelled Plan A this morning. Well He did.

Thank you for your continued prayers for me and the rest of our team.

God's blessings and love from Athens.

Day 6 – February 6, 2016

The Light of the World

Dear Prayer Team,

Matthew 5:14-16 – "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:6 – "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

The team found itself in the middle of an international incident back at the terminal in Piraeus where we served yesterday. We were close to having to call in an international peacekeeping force to restore the peace. Only it wasn't the refugees that were causing a disturbance, it was the relief workers.

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Thankfully I was only involved on the periphery of this incident, but a number of our team members were much closer to the action and got an eyeful and earful. There are a number of different nationalities in the terminal all there with a common goal to serve the refugees. The Greek relief workers feel some ownership of the situation there, but lack a clearly identified, strong leader who takes charge of the effort and organizes the various organizations that are there to serve. The European workers who want to get things done become frustrated and bossy in response to the lack of organization. Things got so bad very recently that one of the European organizations, which had been serving in the terminal for the last month, stormed off after becoming upset with the Greek workers. Today when the same organization returned to serve again, they were not received well by the Greek workers. I overheard a heated conversation about which organization had ownership of the kitchen in the facility. Offense was also taken by the Greek workers because they felt they were not adequately consulted in the way that distributions of hygiene kits and lunches would be done today.

Our team was caught up in the situation, but thankfully we were not the cause of what happened. Yesterday, it had been decided that we would return to the terminal this morning on the invitation of the groups we worked with yesterday, who were pleased to have us there to work with them.

On our way home last night, we stopped at a supermarket and purchased enough bread, meat, cheese and bananas to make 400 lunches for the refugees to distribute today (incredible to think that you can feed an entire terminal full of refugees a meal for just over 300 Euros). The plan was to assemble the lunches when we arrived at the terminal. On the bus on the way over, our leader had the wisdom to appoint a single person from our team who would communicate with the other relief worker organizations. The posture we took was that we were there to serve, and would be guided by however the longer serving and more experienced organizations wanted to handle things. When the situation erupted, we were thankfully there to exert spiritual influence and pray for peace and calm to be restored.



What caused additional stress by the time we arrived this morning was the fact that the distribution of breakfast in the terminal went very poorly. We did not witness this since we had not yet arrived, but heard about it later. The control we exercised yesterday in the distribution of dinner was not repeated in our absence this morning, and contributed further to the tense atmosphere this morning.

We were all there to serve the refugees. However, there is an enemy. Unless you know how he works, and can clearly discern when he rears his ugly head, he will be able to attack and cause division among

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people who should be working together. Please pray that the relief agencies find and appoint the leadership they need to be able to work together effectively for the benefit of the refugees, and for Christians to show up as volunteers who can shine the light of God in a dark place.

I was really happy that we were able to distribute to the refugees many of the hygiene packs that we packed during the first two days of our visit. As we were getting ready to serve lunch, a rumor started that buses to [Macedonia](#) were again running and that they would be leaving from the first terminal I served at when we first arrived yesterday. Based on this rumor, the terminal building where we were serving today emptied quickly. We served lunch without incident to those who had not left to get on the buses to Macedonia. Typical of the disorder here, the rumor that buses were running again turned out to be false.

After lunch, there was an impromptu concert which attracted a fair amount of attention. One of the refugees had a guitar and was singing Arabic songs. People had gathered in a circle around him and were really enjoying it. I wish you could have seen their faces light up. I don't know what he was singing, but I am sure that the music reminded people of a life they once knew back home, and for at least a short time, they were transported back there. I watched as one man teared up as he listened. The singer thanked everyone for the enthusiastic applause he received and kept wanting to stop, but they would not let him leave and he kindly agreed to keep singing. It was a very touching scene. Just as the concert ended, it was time for us to leave the terminal. I found a couple of brothers I met yesterday and went to say goodbye. "Thank you for helping us," was their reward to me after a very emotional couple of days of serving.

The rest of the day was filled with the joy of sightseeing in Athens. For me, it was a trip down memory lane as Lesley and I spent part of our honeymoon in Athens in April 1987. It was my first trip back since then, and we were treated to a scenic bus tour of the city. At sunset we were up on [Mars Hill](#), near the Parthenon. We read Acts 17 and relived the story of the Apostle Paul preaching to the Athenians on the very spot where he preached. Here we were, in the same city, almost 2000 years later, shining the light of Jesus Christ to those who do not yet know him.



Ken Brink on Mars Hill near Acropolis

The only thing that would have made the day more complete was if Lesley had been with me.

Love and blessings from Athens,

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Day 7 – February 7, 2016

Sunday with Greek Evangelicals

Dear Prayer Team,

It was a pretty low key day today, so this report will be shorter than usual. Since it was Sunday, we attended a worship service at a Free Evangelical Greek church which is the home church for our Operation Mobilization hosts Evie and Gabby. We were welcomed warmly and were blessed with translation of the service by one of the members of the congregation. It was interesting to hear some familiar worship songs sung in Greek.

In the afternoon we were invited to lunch at an [Evangelical Church of Greece](#) church in Piraeus Port. The pastor there gave us a tour of the church and led us on a prayer walk around Piraeus, stopping to pray at the park across the street from the church where church members minister to the community, the micro Piraeus port, the town hall where the mayor and municipal workers work, and finally the main Piraeus port. The pastor described the dire economic circumstances faced by Greece, showing us as we walked how many businesses have failed in the area. Over-taxation, combined with declining wages, combined with high unemployment, combined with corruption seems to be a death spiral from which there seems to be no solution. Please pray the Greek people to turn to Jesus Christ for the solution to their economic crisis, and for godly leaders to be raised up who can govern well in the best interests of the people.

We learned that the Evangelical church in Greece consists of about 30,000 members, which for a population of 11-12 million Greek citizens is a very small percentage. The dominant religion is Greek Orthodox. As we passed a beautiful Greek Orthodox church on the prayer walk, one of the OM team members mentioned to me that the head of that church pronounces curses over the evangelical church at least once every year at the start of the new year. The Orthodox Church views the evangelicals as heretics and is very threatened by them. Please pray for the efforts of the evangelical church in Greece, and for the heart of the Orthodox Church leaders to be changed so that there can be collaboration in ministering to the needs of the Greek people.



As we were finishing up our prayer walk in Piraeus, we unexpectedly bumped into the two brothers I mentioned at the close of my update yesterday. We were delighted to see them, as they were to see us. They were about to board a bus which was to take them to the border between Greece and Macedonia.

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The general strike is over, but the farmers in the northern part of the country are still protesting about reductions to their pensions that the Government has forced through. Please pray for a safe onward journey for those we met.

Before we parted again, one of the brothers asked me through a translator if I was a movie actor. When I said no, he asked if I was a journalist. He said that I looked like the actor that portrayed George W. Bush. I assume he was referring to the movie *W* and the actor Josh Brolin. At the Parthenon yesterday, a Gypsy woman, trying to get me to take a rose from her, said that I looked like George Clooney. When I didn't accept the rose, she changed my name to Stingy. Josh Brolin, George Clooney, Stingy – you be the judge.

Tomorrow will be our last full day here. I will do my best to complete and send a wrap-up message this time tomorrow, but we will be getting up early tomorrow and I'll have to get to sleep early tomorrow since we have a very early wake-up time for the flight back home Tuesday. You may only hear from me again sometime Tuesday. Please pray for us as we prepare to wrap up our time here and transition back to our lives back home.

Love and greetings from Athens.

Day 8 – February 8, 2016

Let the Light of Christ Shine In Our Hearts Today and Every Day

Dear Prayer Team,

“And what happened, then? Well, in Whoville they say – that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day. And then – the true meaning of Christmas came through, and the Grinch found the strength of ten Grinches, plus two.” - *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss

Matthew 9:36 – *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Luke 19:10 – *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

How do I attempt to sum up one of the most incredible experiences of my life? It feels like an impossible assignment. Nevertheless, I wanted to write to you one last time before arriving back in Houston.

I've given you some anecdotes over the period of my mission trip that I hoped would make you feel as if you were here living out this adventure with me. I hope I was successful in achieving this goal, but I wish you could have been here with us. The experience was so rich that the anecdotes represent only a

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small fraction of what happened. These updates were focused on my experiences, although in some cases I brought in what I heard shared by other team members. I did my best to accurately recall and capture the experiences I lived this week, but I realize that fogginess in the moment may have resulted in faulty recall. Don't let the possibility of inaccuracies detract from the overall impact of these stories.

So what did I learn during this trip?

Refugees are not to be feared. They are people who have endured a type of hardship that most of us cannot begin to conceive of. They have lost loved ones, seen and experienced horrific things, are bewildered by life in a strange land where they cannot communicate well, and are confused by inaccurate information. They have basic needs which are not being well met (food, drink, shelter). Many feel as if they have been completely forgotten and that no one cares about them. They are lost.

Lost people are the reason Jesus came. He feels incredible compassion for people who are enduring hardship. His heart breaks for those who do not yet know him and who have not received the life that he so freely offers. He wants no one to perish, but desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. He sees their plight and never forgets them.

As a result of being in Greece, ***my heart has been enlarged with compassion for refugees (and migrants) who are really suffering.*** My eyes have been opened to the truth of who they are and the situation they face. I also feel like I am much better equipped to practically respond to their situation than I have ever been before.

What else did I learn? ***The refugee crisis represents a tremendous opportunity to reach unreached people with the love of Jesus Christ.*** Many refugees have rarely if ever had the opportunity to interact with a Christian. They may have never had anyone present the truth of the Gospel to them. In their home country, it may have been highly unlikely that they would be reached. The world they once knew is in turmoil. They feel their only option is to take a perilous journey to a foreign land. The religion they trusted in has no answers for them. And as far as I have seen during my time in Greece, there is no sign of any Muslim organizations here ministering to the needs of their own people.

Christians have an unprecedented opportunity to show Muslim refugees and migrants what it really means to be a Christian. Close proximity with someone who loves Jesus and communicates it to the hurting overcomes language barriers. Kindnesses shown now may prompt them to ask themselves "Who are these followers of Jesus who would care so much about me that they would sacrifice of themselves to provide for my basic needs?" They may realize that their conception of who a Christian is is very different from the reality. I can think of few better opportunities to show the Gospel in action than a situation where the very survival of people is at stake. Even if they never believe, they are still deserving of support, dignity and hope for a better future. We can "be Jesus" to them.

Lastly, I learned that ***this refugee crisis is something that has captivated people in a way few things have.*** I know that was certainly the case with me. God really got my attention when I saw the

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opportunity to participate on this trip, and as I shared before, I felt I really had to go. He helped me to find people like you who shared my interest and who were prepared to partner with me in prayer. He encouraged me during the trip with messages from you that were supportive and encouraging. He has inspired me to pray for big things and has prompted me to ask you to do the same. This is an opportunity for all of us to exercise our faith and expect God to do great things in this situation.

God bless you for the love you have shown for me, our team, the refugees/migrants, our Operational Mobilization hosts and the Greek people by praying for us. What a gift you have all been to me.

Even though these daily updates have now come to a close I would like to ask you to continue to pray about the things I shared with you.

- Pray for many to rise up and respond to this crisis by showing the love of Jesus to precious people.
- Pray that God will bring many to salvation as a result.
- Truly the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few.

Let me know if I can help you in any way to determine the best way for you to respond.

I have one last prayer request. I have arranged to share about my experiences during this trip with a group of friends in our local area this coming Saturday evening and with a group of colleagues at work this coming Monday at lunchtime. Please pray for me as I gather my thoughts and pull together something that they will find valuable and motivating.

May the light of Christ shine in our hearts brightly today and every day from this day forth.

God bless and goodbye from Athens.

Ken Brink

Acknowledgement:

I asked Ken to compile his letters home so that we could share his well written summary of our journey to Greece. Together, we observed first hand the agonizing refugee crisis currently reported around the globe. Ken's narrative captures the essence of our journey. There were nineteen of us, from ***Woodsedge Community Church*** in The Woodlands, Texas and ***Calvary Church*** in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I added

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some links and a few photographs to Ken's unedited words. I live in California, and was blessed to accompany the team.

Well done, Ken. Thank you.

Ken Kemp

Western Regional Director for Global Generosity

[Operation Mobilization, USA](#)

Learn more about [Project Greece](#): Refugees in Crisis