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▲ Scott Griswold of Reach the World Next Door ministries based in Houston

Refugees and migrants focus of conference at Andrews University

The U.N. Refugee Agency reports that by the end of 2015, there were 65.3 million individuals forcibly displaced worldwide due to war, persecution, violence or human rights violations. This means that every minute, every day, 34,000 people are forced to leave their homes in search of safety.

With the number of refugees and migrants increasing daily, this has created a need for mission to those displaced. In light of the current refugee crisis and the effects of globalization, the Department of World Missions collaborated with the North American Division Evangelism Institute and Lake Union Conference to organize the Mission in an Era of Migrants and Refugees Conference on Sept. 13–16 at Andrews University.

The conference, made up of plenaries, break-out sessions and hands-on projects, sought to give more insight on how church members and leaders can meet the humanitarian and evangelistic needs of migrants and refugees at home and abroad. Presenters included off-campus guests who specialized in

refugee and migrant relations, such as Kristine Van Noord, program manager for Bethany Christian Services' Refugee Adult & Family Programs. Also in attendance were on-campus speakers which included Boubakar Sanou, a native of Burkina Faso. The conference covered an abundance of topics ranging from Hispanic migrant issues to refugee ministry among Muslims.

Speaking on what he aimed to achieve as a result of the meetings, Carmelo

Mercado, general vice president and director of Multicultural Ministries for Lake Union Conference said, "My hope is that people will be sensitized to the mission that we have — the mission of reaching out to all people groups." He emphasized the importance of using a biblical approach when ministering to foreigners. "Even though the culture is anti-migrant and anti-refugee, we have a moral obligation to follow what the Scripture says — 'show a spirit of hospitality.'"

Leroy Ramos, a pastor in Milwaukee and originally from Argentina, found the conference beneficial, stating, "It helped me to understand the context of where I work with a lot of foreign people." Tiana Rabearison, also an attendee, found the conference useful due to the increasing number of persons in the United States originally from the 10/40 window. Rabearison said, "Instead of us going to the place ... now God has brought those people to us." He also stated that he hoped that the meetings would propel individuals to reach out to those whom God is bringing from distant shores.



▲ A plenary session featured (left to right): Lake Union President Maurice Valentine, NAD Refugees Coordinator Terri Saelee, Andrews University Religion Chair Glenn Russell, Andrews University Social Work Professor Ingrid Weiss Slikkers, and Andrews University World Mission Professor Gorden Doss.

The conference included testimonies from immigrants and refugees. One such presentation came from violinist Mariela Shaker who escaped Aleppo, her home city devastated by civil war. Talking about her passion for music, Shaker said, "I hope to spread a beautiful message, a message of hope. I believe music has the power to overcome differences and spread peace." Her hope is to conduct music workshops for children in refugee camps because she believes the beauty of music could help them to heal from the pain of war.

Using the example of the Good Samaritan, Mercado encourages, "Follow the Scriptures; *love thy neighbor*, really love them. Look out for your neighbor. Your neighbor is the man who is in need." As for future conferences on mission to migrants and refugees, logistics remain unknown; however, he would like to see it happen again. ■

Felecia Datus is a recent graduate of the Communication graduate program at Andrews University.



▲ NAD Evangelism Institute director Eduard Schmidt talks on church planting for refugee groups.



▲ The Rwandan choir from Grand Rapids sang during the Sabbath program.



LAKE UNION NEWS

Lake Union urges compassion toward "dreamers"

LAKE UNION — In response to the phasing out of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, the Lake Union Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) as well as Multicultural Ministries departments issued a call for compassionate treatment of undocumented immigrants.

On Sept. 5, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that no new applications for DACA — the program allowed law-abiding young adults to attend school and hold jobs for two-year, renewable cycles — would be accepted.

"We believe that Christians should react with compassion and principle to how we deal with undocumented immigrants in our midst," said PARL director, Nicholas Miller. "These persons may be our neighbors, co-workers, friends, students, and even fellow church members. While some have concerns that we should abide by the laws of our nation, many undocumented migrants make no choice to break any laws, but were brought to America by their parents."

The Lake Union has taken the following steps to assist those impacted by the phasing out of the program:

Provide information to aid and support pastors, religious liberty directors, and other qualified and willing persons to aid immigrant members and friends in filing two-year extensions for their DACA. This extension must be filed by Oct. 5, 2017. The sheet can be found at <http://www.lakeunion.org/union-news>.

Provide advocacy information to intelligently and effectively follow the President's example and advice in calling on Congress to pass laws to fix this immigration problem.

"Young people who came to this country through no choice of their own should not be penalized by being sent back to a country that many have not lived in for years, even decades," said Carmelo Mercado, Lake Union Conference general vice president and Multicultural Ministries director. "We think this matter is one that calls biblical Christians to a moral, helpful response, as revealed in Scripture: *[God] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows his love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt* (Deut. 10:18-19 ESV). ■

Debbie Michel, associate director of Communication, Lake Union Conference