Virginia Baptists serve in a Croatian refugee camp

In November 2015, a team of nine Virginia Baptists spent time with Croatian Baptists, serving refugees as they continued their journey in search of peace and provision for their families. They worked with members of Osijek Baptist, a church that has partnered with the local government and other religious groups to set up a winterized camp that can currently hold up to 6,000 refugees at a time.

The volunteers made sure that every person who was served was greeted with warm smiles, eye contact, and kind words wishing God's blessing and a safe journey. The refugees have spent many, many hours on crowded trains and were so exhausted when they arrived at the camp that police had to tap on the train windows with their billy sticks, calling for them to wake up. They had to gather all their belongings and groggy children in order to then line up and be registered—a 90-minute process—before they could reboard the train. They stood, corralled within police barricades, as they awaited the next long leg of their journey.

Forming a “hospitality brigade” to receive refugees as their guests, volunteers at the camp handed out snack bags to the waiting guests with bread, fruit, tuna, a protein bar, and a juice box. They provided hot tea and gave out coats, hats, and scarves. Women and children received backpacks provided by Samaritan’s Purse filled with...
toiletries, a rain poncho, a blanket, and a towel. The people who received the provisions called out, “Thank you,” “We love you,” and gave hugs and kisses.

One team member recalled that one night, they had 1,200 guests. “Each of the 1,200 is a previous person who has made unimaginable sacrifices to survive this far, with hope-filled, harrowing tales to tell. Each of these exhausted, sleep-deprived souls deserves a warm smile, a human touch, and love-filled eyes.”

“It strikes me that the faces passing by are unique and beautiful and come from such varied people groups, cultures, and nations. I marvel at the artistry and nuance of our creative God. No matter the nationality, the race, the culture, we all share our humanity; we smile and cry and laugh and touch. We all would do anything for the peace and security of those we love most. There is great beauty in the humanity that transcends the things that separate us. And I believe it is when my humanity connects in another’s humanity that I encounter God.”

For more information about helping the Croatian refugees, contact:

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The busy camp can hold up to 6,000 refugees at a time.

A mother and her young child navigate through the crowd of refugees.