



REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE: THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN CHURCH IN A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

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The rise of world Christianity calls us to explore new ways of working together as Christians across the continents, especially when faced with huge issues like the refugee crisis that shook the world in 2015-2016. This essay explores, by way of example, how this may happen. It wonders what a church in the majority world may contribute to a resource-rich church in Europe to help, even in a small way, in responding to the crisis? Of course, it asks the question, "what is the role of the African church at this time?" The essay argues that there is indeed a place for the African church to contribute to the Western church in the dialogue on refugees.

The Macedonian Call from Berlin

"We need the help of brothers and sisters from the worldwide body of Christ to join us in reaching out to refugees with the love of Christ." The call is a familiar one, often heard from resource-poor communities of the global south seeking help from those who have more material wealth. However, these are not the words of a pastor or mission leader working somewhere in Africa or South East Asia. These were the words penned by Horst Engelmann, a respected leader in mission in

Germany in November 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis that saw almost one million migrants enter Germany in a few months.¹ The call was an invitation for churches around the world to join with churches in Germany to care for the increasing number of immigrants. One of the churches that echoed this impassioned plea was Mavuno Church Berlin, a German Christian community in Berlin with ties to a Pentecostal church in Nairobi, Kenya.

The enormity of the current world refugee crisis demands urgent responses. The current numbers in Europe and elsewhere, even if estimated conservatively, are large. Add to this the complexity of managing migrant communities within urban centres and the seemingly inevitable clash of cultures and religions set against the backdrop of terror threats and multi-dimensional economic challenges; all contribute to form a multifarious landscape upon which the refugee crisis unfolds.² Elfan Rees, the chair of the executive committee for the World Refugee Year 1959-1960, argued over half a century ago that addressing the challenge of refugees "will only be possible by international co-operation on a much more massive scale than has hitherto been achieved."³ In this paper, I will argue that this is still true today in the specific case of refugees in the European Union. This cooperation needs to extend beyond secular non-governmental organisations to the *church global* whose mandate, in part, is to model the Gospel as it relates to the vulnerable. Using two examples, we will see how the church in Africa can have a role to play and catalyse this discussion though her contribution has not been evident.

The International Organization for Migration reports that in 2015, close to one million refugees arrived in Europe by land and sea.⁴ The UN and Europe are keeping a close watch on the numbers as the crisis continues to unfold.⁵ It needs to be said here that statistics for refugees are generally problematic and, according to Rees, "Statistical procedures vary across the world from the scientific to mere guesswork. It is probably wise to assume that even the most conservative estimates are inflated."⁶ However, even with the most conservative

¹ Horst Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees, March 10-20, 2016," November 9, 2015.

² June J. H. Lee, *World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2015), 77-78.

³ Elfan Rees, "The Refugee Problem: Joint Responsibility," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 329 (May 1, 1960): 15-22; Peter Gatrell, *Free World?: The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-1963* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89-91.

⁴ "EU Migrant, Refugee Arrivals by Land and Sea Approach One Million in 2015," *International Organization for Migration*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.iom.int/news/eu-migrant-refugee-arrivals-land-and-sea-approach-one-million-2015>.

⁵ "The Sea Route to Europe: The Mediterranean Passage in the Age of Refugees," *UNHCR*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/5592bd059.html>; "UNHCR Proposals in Light of the EU Response to the Refugee Crisis," *UNHCR*, September 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/55f28c4c9.html>; Philippe Fargues, "Europe Must Take on Its Share of the Syrian Refugee Burden, but How?" 2014.

⁶ Rees, "The Refugee Problem."

of estimates, what cannot be in doubt is the trauma, vulnerability, and poverty that attend the majority of those who fit the definition of “refugee.” To quote Rees again here:

Nothing tempers the cold wind of exile for the ultimate refugees – those who come within the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner. Leaving home and hearth of their own decision, withal compelled by fear, risking their lives *en route*, they reject, as they go, any right to the protection of their government and so arrive, defenceless and helpless, in a strange country with a strange language and other customs, the bewildered guests of embarrassed hosts who have no obligations toward them other than those dictated by common humanity. They are indeed the “men who came to dinner.”⁷

The point made here is that the refugee issue involves large numbers of people living in desperate conditions and in need of intervention by their fellow human beings of goodwill. We now look at African engagement in the refugee discourse.

The Crisis and Africa’s Voice

The national financial and social burden of refugees remains unevenly distributed around the world. Using available data on refugees, Oxfam reports

that “the six wealthiest nations host less than nine per cent of the world’s refugees while poorer countries shoulder most of the responsibility.”⁸ European governments, informed by the complex context of that continent, have given varied official responses to the refugee crisis in 2015.⁹ Taking Germany, for instance, we see a combination of policy decisions along with financial commitments which the nation made to manage, receive, and accommodate refugees.¹⁰ Germany’s response to the crisis in 2015 was to make a commitment to receive hundreds of thousands of refugees as part of its contribution. This is consistent with the refugee convention of 1951 and the protocol of 1967, of which it was a signatory country.¹¹ The nation made public these commitments thus inviting dialogue at continental and global levels.¹²

Germany has had a fair share of challenges on this issue locally. While the policy to partially open its borders to refugees seemed, for many outside, to be warm and amenable to refugees, some of the local sentiments were negative, even deceitful, and violent.¹³ This has been further compounded by incidents that point to violence from the migrants themselves and the repercussions of this on local populations.¹⁴ The point made here is that the refugee issue is expansive in terms of numbers and geographical scope, and it is also highly complex, locally and internationally. Germany is one example;

⁷ Rees, “The Refugee Problem.”

⁸ “A Poor Welcome from the World’s Wealthy,” accessed July 18, 2016, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en.pdf.

⁹ Fargues, “Europe Must Take on Its Share of the Syrian Refugee Burden, but How?”; “Framing Migration: Rhetoric and Reality in Europe,” *CritCom: A Forum for Research and Commentary on Europe*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/critcom/framing-migration-rhetoric-and-reality-in-europe/?gclid=Cj0KEQIAzO6zBRC25Ju1idGJiZkBEiQAP3Sf6JhH3aOa8KSGtTwyDCAjoQ28DIB0Yu1OzyT2h9b5-EaAhFN8P8HAQ>.

¹⁰ Simon Morgan, “Germany Wins Hearts with Warm Response to Refugee Crisis,” *Business Insider*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-germany-wins-hearts-with-warm-response-to-refugee-crisis-2015-9>; “Germany Rethinks Its Response to the Refugee Crisis,” *Stratfor*, accessed December 25, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/germany-rethinks-its-response-refugee-crisis>.

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” *UNHCR*, accessed July 19, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>.

¹² Morgan, “Germany Wins Hearts with Warm Response to Refugee Crisis”; Leonid Bershidsky, “German Response to Refugees Puts U.S. to Shame,” *BloombergView*, November 17, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-11-17/german-response-to-refugees-puts-u-s-to-shame>; “Germany’s Response to Refugee Crisis Encouraged Illegal Migration: Czech PM,” *The Globe and Mail*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/germanys-response-to-refugee-crisis-encouraged-illegal-migration-czech-pm/article27935934/>.

¹³ Andrew Griffin, “Picture of a Refugee Holding an Isis Flag. It’s a Complete Lie,” *The Independent*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-flag-picture-that-claims-to-show-refugees-attacking-police-goes-viral-and-is-a-lie-10501290.html>; Kirstie McCrum, “Truth behind Picture Claiming to Show Syrian Refugees Waving ISIS Flag,” *Mirror*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/islamic-state-fighter-refugees-clashing-6447418>; “German Migrant Crisis: Arson Suspected in Refugee Home Fires,” *BBC News*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35174668>; “Violence against Refugees Rising in Germany,” *DW.COM*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/violence-against-refugees-rising-in-germany/a-18829303>.

¹⁴ This situation continues to unfold with new twists that continue to complicate the scenario. One example is the recent incident of attacks on German women over the New Year celebrations in Cologne. “Cologne Attackers Were of Migrant Origin - Minister,” *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35280386>; James Rothwell, “Cologne Sex Attacks: Mob Attacks Group of Migrants in ‘Manhunt’ for Suspects,” January 11, 2016, sec. World, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/12092354/Cologne-sex-attacks-New-Years-Eve-cases-rise-to-more-than-500.html>; “Germany Shocked by Cologne New Year Gang Assaults on Women,” *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35231046>; Simon Shuster, “Racist Violence in Germany Again Tests Merkel’s Openness To Refugees,” *Time*, January 13, 2016, <http://time.com/4178642/racist-violence-germany-refugees/>; “Migrants Protest in German Cities after ‘Revenge’ Attacks,” *Mail Online*, January 16, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3402818/Migrants-protest-German-cities-revenge-attacks-New-Year-s-Eve-wave-assaults-women.html>.

the same is true of many other countries in Europe.¹⁵ What is missing in this complex discourse though, is the African contribution. Many refugees in Europe originate from Africa, especially from the Western and Northern regions, but Africa has not spoken audibly on the subject.

Africa, like Europe, has had a history of refugee crises stretching back over the last 50 years. Historically, most of the African national boundaries that the refugees are crossing have only been in effective existence for less than 150 years. European governments formulated these boundaries driven by political and economic motives. While people movements have been there before, large refugee movements in Africa can be traced back to the last 50 years. They coincide with the beginning of the struggle for selfhood of the African states in the 1960s.¹⁶ Fifty years after independence, many African countries have experience of hosting refugees from other countries. Of course, there are many more refugees in some African countries than all those who have crossed the Mediterranean put together.¹⁷ Thus, Africa does have something to say about refugee crises, not just because her context has produced many refugees, some of whom have fled to Europe, but also because she has also been the host of the majority of these refugees. The numbers have varied over the years. By and large, the ratios of refugees to host country populations have been very high, often much higher than those we now see in Europe. It is for this reason that the absence of Africa's voice in the global discussion matters and needs to be queried.

If Africa were to contribute, we would need to ask what the starting point of this discussion would be. The continent has faced much political upheaval in the last 20 years. Africa's credibility on the global platform has consistently suffered from the

missteps that have arisen in her relatively young democracies. This may be why the world does not often consult African states for political or policy input in global issues such as the one in this discussion. While negative examples of African political failures dominate the African sections of world news, some of the fledgling African economies regularly feature in the lists of top emerging markets in which to invest or do business.¹⁸ Local investment, infrastructure, and policy development are beginning to bear fruit, eventually positioning many countries for global business.¹⁹ Even so, Africa is still not a contributor in financial terms when it comes to the global refugee crisis. There are hardly any instances where the continent has given technical or material assistance.

What is interesting is that although the continent has not previously contributed to the global discourse on refugees, the assembly of world states through the UN resolution 1208 in 1998 recognised Africa's experience in addressing refugee crises.²⁰ This unanimously adopted resolution, while affirming the need for a concerted international response to the refugee crisis on the continent, recognised "the extensive experience of African States in hosting refugees and in dealing with the effects of refugee camps and settlements."²¹ This is an important admission given the relative youth of Africa's national governments and the small sizes of the individual economies.

How will this reported African experience on refugees be tapped for the benefit of the international community? If historical and economic hurdles limit government-to-government interactions, and NGO dialogue revolves around donor-recipient relationships, is there any way in which Africans can contribute?

¹⁵ "How to Manage the Migrant Crisis," *The Economist*, February 6, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21690028-european-problem-demands-common-coherent-eu-policy-let-refugees-regulate>; Niraj Chokshi, "The Stunning Acceleration of Europe's Migration Crisis, in One Chart," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/10/the-stunning-acceleration-of-europes-migration-crisis-in-one-chart/>; "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Graphics," *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>; "Europe's Migrant Crisis in Numbers," *The Economist*, February 5, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/02/daily-chart-5>.

¹⁶ Cassandra R. Veney, *Forced Migration in Eastern Africa: Democratization, Structural Adjustment, and Refugees*, 2007, 8–9; B.C. Nindi, "Africa's Refugee Crisis in a Historical Perspective," *Transafrican Journal of History* 15 (January 1, 1986): 96–107.

¹⁷ Veney, *Forced Migration in Eastern Africa: Democratization, Structural Adjustment, and Refugees*, 4; "Refugees: The African Numbers That Put Europe to Shame; It Needs to Think Again," *Mail & Guardian Africa*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-09-27-refugees-what-can-europe-learn-from-africa/>.

¹⁸ "Best Emerging Markets For The Money - In Photos: Best Emerging Market Countries To Invest In This Month," *Forbes*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eglg45elefh/best-emerging-markets-for-the-money/>; "Africa Scoops Five Places In Emerging Markets' Top 10 Property 'Risk Index,'" *Forbes*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rogeraitken/2015/10/26/africa-scoops-five-places-in-emerging-markets-top-10-property-risk-index/>; "The 20 Fastest-Growing Economies This Year," *Bloomberg.com*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-25/the-20-fastest-growing-economies-this-year>.

¹⁹ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Ibrahim Forum 2013: Africa Ahead: The Next 50 Years* (Addis Ababa: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2013).

²⁰ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)," *Refworld*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae9acc50.html>.

²¹ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)," *Refworld*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae9acc50.html>.

I propose here that there is at least one way in which we can approach this dialogue. This is through the church. The Protestant church in Africa has had troubled times in her interaction with the Western church in the past 50 years.²² That said, during this same period the church in Africa has grown in numbers and influence on the global stage, and has emerged as a force to be reckoned with. As Andrew Walls and others famously observed, the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the global south.²³ The African church is now welcome to the global table to make her contribution on varied issues such as leadership, discipleship, and missions.²⁴

In addition to this, we are now in an era when missions are not just a one-way street, but two-way between Africa and the West.²⁵ Unlike the global political, economic, and NGO arenas where there has been little or no space for the African voice, the African church has value to bring to the table.²⁶ Churches in Africa experience at first hand the plight of refugees and the effects of migration in a religiously and ethnically diverse context. The African-led churches in Europe and North America are often ethnically and racially diverse spaces that are keenly aware of the dynamics of migrant life.²⁷

The church in Europe, though not as politically

powerful as it once was, shares in the universal Christian mandate to take care of the alien, the marginalised and the poor – attributes which describe aspects of the refugee's life. Speaking about the present European Refugee Crisis, Olav Tveit, Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, headquartered in Switzerland, restated the challenge for churches worldwide to "rediscover their identity, their integrity, and their vocation as the church of the stranger. For we are the Church of Jesus Christ, the child refugee (cf. Matthew 2:13)."²⁸ The global church is one arena where meaningful, inclusive and mutually enriching dialogue can take place over the issue of refugees in Europe. The African church, therefore, is one way through which Africa can contribute to the discourse on refugees in the world in general, and in Europe, in particular.

The Case of Mavuno Church Berlin and Forum Wiedenest

We turn now to practical examples of how this dialogue is unfolding between Christians in Kenya and Germany. Mavuno Church is a charismatic church planted by the Nairobi Chapel in 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya.²⁹ This church, like its mother church, Nairobi Chapel, has a vision to plant churches in Africa and around the world.³⁰ Mavuno Church has launched congregations in five countries in Africa.³¹

²² The tension between the Anglican church in Africa and that of the West illustrates this tension well. Michael Paulson, "African Anglicans Try to Transform US Church - The Boston Globe," September 5, 2007, http://archive.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/09/05/african_anglicans_try_to_transform_us_church/; "Anglican Church around the World," BBC, July 15, 2008, sec. Special Reports, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3226753.stm>; Luis Lugo, Brian J Grim, and Elizabeth Podrebarac, "Global Anglicanism at a Crossroads," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/19/global-anglicanism-at-a-crossroads/>.

²³ See Todd Johnson and Sun Young Chung. "Tracking Global Christianity's Statistical Centre of Gravity, Ad 33 - Ad 2100." *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 369 (April 2004): 166-81. Also Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4; Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 116-117.

²⁴ Take, for example, the invitation of an African to address Urbana conferences on missions, and the adoption of African models for discipleship and outreach by American churches. See "Africans Redefine Mariners Church Outreach," *The Orange County Register*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/church-525826-mariners-mavuno.html>; Oscar Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 2006, <https://vimeo.com/69504380>.

²⁵ Toyin Falola, Nimi Wariboko, and Wilhelmina Kalu, eds., *African Pentecostalism: V. I: Global Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges and Connections: The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu* (Asmara, Eritrea; Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010), 268-269; Todd Johnson, "The Global Demographics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal," *Symposium: Global Perspectives on Pentecostalism* 46, no. 6 (November 2009): 479-83, doi:10.1007/s12115-009-9255-0; Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010), 159-176.

²⁶ Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 4:00-12:00.

²⁷ Evangelos Karagiannis and Nina Glick Schiller, "... the Land Which the Lord Your God Giveth You.: Two Churches Founded by African Migrants in Oststadt, Germany," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 265-78; Afe Adogame, "Who Do They Think They Are? Mental Images and the Unfolding of an African Diaspora in Germany," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 248-64; Alle G. Hoekema, "The Position of African Christians in the Netherlands," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 314-22.

²⁸ Olav Fykse Tveit, "Statement on Refugees in Europe — World Council of Churches," Document, accessed December 29, 2015, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/statements/statement-on-refugees-in-europe/>.

²⁹ "Mavuno Church Website," n.d., <http://www.mavunochurch.org/new/>; Oscar Muriu, "The History of Church Planting at Nairobi Chapel," *Chapelites: Anniversary Edition*, November 2014.

³⁰ "Mavuno Church - Mavuno History," *Mavuno Church*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.mavunochurch.org/new/content.php?id=51>; "Nairobi Chapel Church Plants," July 23, 2014, http://www.nairobichapel.org/NC/inc_nc.php?sec=ministries&nc=Daughter%20Churches&ncp=Daughter%20Churches%20intro.

³¹ These are Nairobi in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda, Lusaka in Zambia, Blantyre in Malawi, and Kigali in Rwanda. See "Mavuno Church Website."

The church has also sent teams to start church planting work in an additional five countries.³² Mavuno Church has, within its community of churches, a congregation in Berlin, Germany,³³ called Mavuno Church Berlin, which was launched in 2011. At the time, a German couple, Daniel and Nancy Flechsig, were commissioned from Kenya to go back to Germany to plant a sister-congregation to Mavuno Church. They had been on a three-year cross-cultural training exchange programme under the Forum Wiedenest Institution partnership with the Nairobi Chapel, and it was during this stay in Kenya that they caught the vision. The board of elders approached the Flechsigs to ask them to lead the 100-year-old EFG Lichterfelde, which was experiencing a steady decline. In a rare turn of events the EFG Lichterfelde submitted itself to Mavuno Church's leadership and vision, and was relaunched as Mavuno Church Berlin (or in short, Mavuno Berlin) under the leadership of the Flechsigs.³⁴

The process of relaunching itself as Mavuno Berlin has been a time for great learning, for both the church in Berlin and Mavuno Church in Nairobi. The leadership has progressively negotiated and overcome many cross-cultural, multi-linguistic, and leadership challenges coming from this initiative. Mavuno Berlin, right from its inception, was incarnational in its context, serving the community; through the 'Spread the Love' initiatives the church emulated the Mavuno church.³⁵ In 2015, with the influx of Syrian and other refugees into Germany, the church sought to be relevant by reaching out to them and serving them. In September 2015, Mavuno Berlin through Daniel Flechsig made a passionate plea to the Mavuno Churches for prayers and support as they navigated the challenges of caring for refugees in their city. It is this plea for prayer that inspired in the author the need for these reflections.³⁶

Similarly, on November 9, 2015, Horst Engelmann, the Director of World Mission at Forum Wiedenest, a Christian mission training institution in Bergneustadt, Germany, issued an invitation for support with refugees from church networks connected with them.³⁷ This invitation was directed to "Christians from Kenya, Sri Lanka, Egypt, USA, South Africa and other countries."³⁸ Forum Wiedenest, the Brethren institution, has a cultural and theological training partnership with Nairobi Chapel and, by extension, with Mavuno Church and their partners around the world. Engelmann's request came, among other churches, to Nairobi Chapel and Mavuno Church. The invitation was to engage with the German church in outreach mission weeks from 9-20 March 2016 in Germany, Greece, and other places in Europe. In his letter, Engelmann made an admission that is unusual for the Western church: "We need the help of brothers and sisters from the worldwide body of Christ to join us in reaching out to refugees with the love of Christ."³⁹

The outreach mission week of March 2016 was hosted by Forum Wiedenest and their partners. Teams of volunteers from German churches affiliated with Forum Wiedenest joined many other teams from around the world serving refugees. The teams were cross-cultural in composition. They engaged with the refugees in on-going projects as well as new initiatives. There was cross-cultural training and the exchange of time and resources. This outreach addressed the needs of the refugees in Germany using an approach that integrated cross-cultural input from Christians from around the world.⁴⁰ The team included three members from Mavuno Church in Nairobi.

³² These are Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Johannesburg in South Africa, Gaborone in Botswana, Bujumbura in Burundi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

³³ "Mavuno Berlin," *Mavuno Berlin Website*, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://web.facebook.com/217099715011720/photos/a.217121368342888.64636.217099715011720/217121371676221/?type=3>; "Mavuno Berlin Launch," *Mavuno Berlin Launch: Facebook Post*, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://web.facebook.com/217099715011720/photos/a.217121368342888.64636.217099715011720/217121371676221/?type=3>.

³⁴ "Mavuno Berlin Launch."

³⁵ "Mavuno Spread The Love - September 2010," n.d., <https://mavuno.wordpress.com/2010/09/04/spread-the-love/>; "Take 10 from Mavuno Berlin: Highlights from 2011," *Campus News - Mavuno World*, 10, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://mavunoworldcampuses.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/take-10-from-mavuno-berlin-highlights-from-2011-2/>.

³⁶ Kyama Mugambi, "Refugee Situation Berlin," September 16, 2015; Ole Glöckner, "Refugee Situation Berlin: Reply," September 21, 2015.

³⁷ "Forum Wiedenest," *Forum Wiedenest*, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.wiedenest.de/ueber-uns/ueber-uns/schulungszentrum.html>; Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees March 10-20, 2016."

³⁸ Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees March 10-20, 2016."

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The Significance and Role of the African Church

The request for help by Mavuno Berlin and Forum Wiedenest is important for this dialogue in several ways. First, this invitation is a unique example of an opportunity provided by a Western church community for the church in Africa to actively engage with a cause that is of mutual concern. As mentioned above, the two-thirds-world-churches are rarely at the table as participants with something useful to offer. Conversely, many interactions between Western churches and the two-thirds world have been in contexts where the church in the West had both the gospel and resources to offer. The West has often relegated the two-thirds world to the role of recipients. This is a role the global south has seemed to encourage. In their plea for help, Engelmann and Flechsig demonstrate extraordinary humility, and a willingness to step outside historical precedence to forge a new direction in global cooperation for a crisis that affects humanity. Such a posture is highly unusual both in the religious and secular contexts. What is also unusual is the reception of this message by Mavuno Church. For instance, Muriithi Wanjau, the senior pastor of Mavuno Church, accepted the invitation and considered engagement in this outreach as a key step forward.⁴¹ Wanjau responded to the invitation by sending a self-funded team, including a pastor and church leaders, from Nairobi. If Engelmann demonstrates a unique humility in his admission of need, then Wanjau demonstrates uncharacteristic boldness in his consideration of the offer. We see in Wanjau a willingness to step beyond the recipient posture of the African church into a posture of contribution on a global scale. Oscar Muriu, the senior pastor of Nairobi Chapel in Kenya, and the likes of Mensa Otabil, the senior pastor of International Central Gospel Church, in Accra, Ghana, model this boldness to contribute on the global stage.⁴² This complementary humility and boldness in leadership in both continents is a welcome and useful change that will forge a way forward for the future worldwide church in this and other issues.

Second, the incarnational presence demonstrated by this initiative carries a powerful witness of the unity of the church globally. Engelmann states it in this way: "Our intention is that participants from other countries will mix themselves with the German participants making the teams a shining example of

how people from different ethnic backgrounds can work together in unity." Through his extensive experience as a missionary engaging Christians from both Africa and Europe, Engelmann is keenly aware of how effective cross-cultural teams can be when they act in unity to a common cause. In the teams envisaged in this refugee initiative, we saw "cross-cultural triangles" formed for service. Such cross-cultural triangles, formed by a host's culture or cultures, joined by a visitor's culture or cultures, serving a third culture, have proved inspiring and effective for all who participate. One such example is the 'Spread the Love' community, an impact initiative started in Nairobi but emulated around the world.⁴³ Wiedenest's outreach week also demonstrates interdenominational unity extending beyond geographical, cultural, and racial boundaries. This interdenominationalism is important for the health of the worldwide church. It is also an indicator of the new and fast-growing kind of Christianity that is emerging in the majority world.⁴⁴

Third, this invitation opens up a new space for cross-cultural dialogue. In providing an opportunity for the church in Africa to engage with the refugees in Europe, possibilities emerge of what global, reciprocal dialogue looks like. Presently, I am not optimistic that this kind of dialogue can even occur, let alone be effective, within global intergovernmental, and NGO forums in the short-term. However, I am hopeful that this inter-church engagement may serve as a catalyst for inclusive discussions in Christian circles for African, European, North American, Latin American, and Asian Christians. Here, all can sit at the same table and deliberate on what they can share with each other. This will make a way for the kind of reciprocity that has been lacking in global discourse on pan-human crises. If, as the UN resolved, Africa has something to share with the world about engaging with the refugee crises, then this is one avenue where this experience can be tapped into.⁴⁵ The responsibility is, therefore, immense for leaders of these communities, to continue to initiate and carry out this kind of dialogue.

Fourth, Christianity in Africa addresses very different theological concerns from the church in the West. Many of these concerns will resonate with refugees around the world. They include concerns about poverty, slavery, religious conflict, health, suffering,

⁴¹ Muriithi Wanjau, "October US Trip Report," November 2015.

⁴² Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 20:00–22:00; Shaw, *Global Awakening*, 159–176.

⁴³ Outreach, "Go Spread the Love," accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.marinerschurch.org/compass/go-spread-the-love>.

⁴⁴ Dale T. Irvin, "The Church, the Urban, and the Global: Mission in an Age of Global Cities," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 177–82.

⁴⁵ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)."

hope in the face of struggle, family, and community.⁴⁶ Could it be that long-term solutions for addressing refugees may be catalysed by active engagement with African Christians? Could it be that the global church, while fulfilling its mandate for mutual support, may provide pointers for what cross-cultural, inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation may look like? Jonathan Bonk suggests that “Africans ... with all of their daunting challenges—perhaps in some ways because of them—will continue to give a central place to God.”⁴⁷ Could it be that the African church, participating with the European church, will provide an important, yet missing, spiritual and moral dimension in the global discussion on refugees that until now has been addressed by UN agencies, secular NGOs and Western governments?

The answers to these questions may not be fully addressed by the limited scope of Mavuno and Wiedenest’s interaction with each other during the few months towards the end of 2015, going into 2016. We are not even certain whether, given the current immigration challenges in Europe, the churches can overcome the inherent logistical hurdles of bringing in Christians from Africa to Europe. Be that as it may, the decisions and interactions of the leaders of these institutions will provide glimpses of what is possible; eventually, such initiatives could increase to incorporate more of the churches around the world.

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⁴⁶ Jonathan J. Bonk, “Africa Unbound,” *ChristianityToday.com*, November 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/november/38.46.html>; Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 08:00–10:00.

⁴⁷ Bonk, “Africa Unbound.”