

Singing Praises in a Refugee Camp

A story from Namibia

References to slides relate to the PowerPoint available at methodist.org.uk/GlobalRelationshipsResources, with slide 1 opening your service

Osire Refugee camp is situated in arid lands 225km north of the capital Windhoek. In the camp, the Methodist Church has established a flourishing ministry to asylum seekers and refugees from countries across Africa and further afield, though most are from war zones in Angola and Congo.

The Methodist ministry in the camp was begun by Revd Everestu Kemaya. A refugee from Congo and a former camp resident, Revd Everestu is now the circuit minister for the Rundu Circuit in the north of Namibia, bordering Angola. Today, the camp is served by Malanda Boniface Kassander, an evangelist who lives in the camp and is himself a refugee [slide 2].



Slide 2: Refugees in church

About 30 church members of all ages meet in a simple mud-brick, tin-roofed building that serves as their church. For the next two hours, the church is filled with singing, dancing and praise to God for the gift of life and for all God provides.

The Methodist Church is committed to providing basic needs to camp residents and pre-school education for the children so that they have opportunities for the future [slide 3]. Of the three Kindergarten schools in the camp, two are Methodist.

Each month the residents are given maize meal, beans, cooking oil, salt and sugar. Because of the shortage of wood in the barren landscape, they are not allowed to collect wood outside the camp, so they are sometimes given wood and paraffin for cooking. Many grow their own vegetables both to feed themselves and to supplement their income.



Slide 3: Primary School built by the Methodist Church in Namibia at Osire Refugee Camp.

Life in the refugee camp is not easy. It is possible to find work outside the camp but to do so requires a permit from the government. Moreover, the nearest town is a long way away; public transport is expensive and there is a high rate of unemployment in Namibia.

Repatriation to their home countries is impossible for most camp residents due to political instability and violence in their countries of origin. Meanwhile, settlement in Europe or beyond is extremely difficult.

Many are skilled but they do not have the money to buy the equipment that would enable them to work. Many would like to undertake educational courses online, but there is little internet connectivity availability and few people possess computers.

In spite of these many challenges, the resilience, faith and determination of the residents is inspiring and humbling. Most had been through horrific experiences in their lives and yet they are determined to build a better future for their families and make a positive contribution to the life of any community in which they settle. Despite all the challenges that they face, their love of God and gratitude for God's gifts shines through.

Questions for reflection

- What can we learn from the people at Osire Refugee Camp?
- What can/should the Church do to make for a more peaceful world?
- If you lost everything, would you still be praising God?

Bible verses

Isaiah 40:31 Psalm 23:4 Philippians 4:6-8 Romans 8:18