

God knows their names

I run Matthew House in Toronto, Canada, a small, Christ-based shelter for refugees. Since 1998 we have provided short-term housing for hundreds of people from more than 70 countries. But I know there are thousands, even millions, of refugees that we can't help. Sometimes, late at night when I see the masses of desperate people on TV, I've asked the Lord, "God, do you really know all these people by name?"

And sometimes God answers yes.

One cold January night, a Christian family from Africa arrived at the Toronto bus terminal, strangers in a strange land. They didn't know where to look for help. But the man had noticed a woman on the bus reading her Bible. He approached her and, in broken English, he explained his predicament. The woman said that she couldn't assist him, but she knew of a place that could. She wrote "Matthew House" on a slip of paper, gave him money for a hotel room that night, and told him to take a taxi to Matthew House in the morning.

Now, Toronto is a sprawling metropolis of more than 5 million people. You won't find the address of Matthew House in the phone book, and we don't have a sign on our door. Most local people—and most of the city's taxi drivers--wouldn't know where to find us.

But the next morning, when the African family left the hotel, they asked the first taxi driver they saw, "Do you know Matthew House?" Yes, he said. Ten minutes later he dropped them off in front of our skinny old three-storey house and said, "This is it."

The family had some doubts at first, but when they entered the house, they knew they were at the place of God's leading. But there was a problem. Matthew House only has room for 12 people, and it was full. I could offer the family lunch and help with their refugee asylum application, but I could not offer them a place to sleep—not even a sofa.

My heart ached. Why had God brought this family from so far away only to have us send them away? The answer soon came. "Guess what just happened!" our office manager told me. "The family that was staying in our family room is moving out this afternoon!"

Three days later, the mother of this family—we'll call her Julie—asked us to help her see if she had any relatives in Canada. She had not seen any of her siblings since she fled from the Congo eighteen years ago. She didn't know if they were dead or alive. An internet search had found some people with her family name, Lwamba, in the western Canadian city of Saskatoon, but their phone was disconnected.

My heart leaped when I heard "Lwamba" and "Saskatoon". These had to be the famous Lwamba brothers, members of the Christian band, Krystaal! They've performed at the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham, at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, on Oprah Winfrey's show—and even at benefit concert for Matthew House.

We found Krystaal's website and showed Julie the picture of the three singers on the computer screen. "Do you know these men?" I asked.

Julie gasped. She pointed to each one by name, and collapsed in tears. She lifted her hands to heaven and began repeating the words, "Merci, Seigneur" (Thank you, Lord).

These men were her brothers! They had recently moved to Toronto along with another

brother, George, who was planting a Baptist church here. Within minutes we had located 25 members of Julie's family, all in the Toronto area.

We don't know the name of the woman at the bus station, or the identity of the driver who brought Julie's family to our door. But God knows. And stories like this one remind us that this world and everyone in it belong to him.

-By Anne Woolger-Bell

More testimonies are posted at www.bwawd.org.