

Refugees find care in city known for slave trade history

By Chris Doyle

International Mission Board

A redeeming shift in its treatment of internationals is happening in Charleston, South Carolina. What was once a major port for enslaved people is now a harbor for diaspora groups, and Southern Baptists are an important part of the culture change.

Diaspora refers to “the movement, migration, settlement or scattering of people away from one’s indigenous homeland.” In North America, diaspora people comprise immigrants, refugees and international students.□

Earlier this year, the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board and Woman’s Missionary Union announced its partnership with other Southern Baptist entities to form Diaspora Missions Collective. Christians’ outreach to internationals in Charleston is a great example of what Diaspora Missions Collective wants to accomplish in reaching all nations, people, languages and tribes with the gospel, no matter where they live.

Read more about the forming of Diaspora Missions Collective.

Charleston’s Gadsden’s Wharf received as many as 260,000 slaves from 1670 to 1808. Today, with help from The Hub Ministry Center, Charleston has become a modern day “Ellis Island” for refugees coming from Africa, the Middle East and Central and South America.

The Hub Ministry Center partners with Send Relief, Charleston Baptist Association, and the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The center provides refugees with transitional

assistance and care in transportation, education, recreation and vocational training. They also provide relational care through community and compassion. The Hub's future vision is to offer transitional housing and a medical clinic.

"We want to show the Kingdom of God by demonstrating love through welcoming the stranger," Craig Tuck said. Tuck is the associational missions strategist for Charleston Baptist Association, which has its office located in The Hub Ministry Center.

The history of The Hub starts with a declining church in 2020 that was willing to be "replanted and repurposed" to become Centerpoint Church. Its focus was to be multiethnic and multicultural. Tuck said Centerpoint created The Hub on the church's eight-acre campus as a non-profit community center. Then refugees started coming to Charleston in 2022, and The Hub increased its missional focus.

"We are saying to those who come as refugees, 'You are precious lives, and we will help you.' That to me is the beautiful picture of the gospel and the Kingdom demonstrating itself," Tuck said.

Congolese refugees find help, hope through The Hub

A group of nearly 50 people from the Congo have been living as refugees for more than 20 years because of political unrest in their country. After living in refugee camps in Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe, these Congolese finally reached Charleston and found a chance for new life and new hope.

The Hub has helped them through their transition, but the Congolese are also finding acceptance at Centerpoint.

"What's happening is they're coming to The Hub to get support and care, but then the church here is also welcoming them," Tuck said. "Some of them are Muslim who are coming to our church every week because they find community and feel loved."

Steve and Melinda McMillan are former missionaries to the Congo and moved to Charleston five years ago in retirement. God provided them a ministry through The Hub as translators for Congolese refugees and as logistical coordinators for newly appointed refugee residents.

“Steve and Melinda have made great relationships with the Congolese refugees,” Tuck said. “You see the gospel going forward in these relationships. They are now leading a Bible study for Congolese at Centerpoint.”

Modeling the Diaspora Missions Collective’s intention

“The nations are coming in, and here is an example of Southern Baptists meeting a need in Charleston,” John Barnett said, regarding The Hub and its impact of sharing the gospel with refugees.

As director of the diaspora mobilization team, Barnett explained the purpose of Diaspora Missions Collective is for collaboration, helping the local church reach the nations.

“Not everybody could do what [The Hub in Charleston is] doing, but it’s a great example of how they are reaching other nations,” he said. “They’ve partnered well in the community.”

Barnett pointed out how The Hub, Centerpoint Church, Charleston Baptist Association, the South Carolina Baptist Convention and other ministries are working the missionary task together in Charleston. Through their recently adopted 10×10 Plan, the South Carolina convention has made a substantial financial commitment to the Charleston Baptist Association to help jumpstart The Hub.

“Craig Tuck’s vision for The Hub is innovative and refreshing,” said Tony Wolfe, executive director-treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. “As opportunity multiplies for meaningful gospel-centered ministry, the Charleston Baptist Association and its local partners are

rising to their time to demonstrate the love of God to all people. Through ministries like this, the greater Charleston area is being saturated and transformed by the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In Great Commission cooperation, the ministry partners work with churches who are walking with refugees in their life journeys.

“They’re the first touch in helping to welcome them,” Barnett said. “They’re helping people get jobs and learn English, but through all this, they’re sharing the gospel and connecting with the international churches that are there.

“This is what the Diaspora Missions Collective is about,” he continued. “We want to work through our existing Southern Baptist entities, like our associations, that are connected with local churches, so that we can have more impact on reaching the nations here in our neighborhoods.”

Just like the many conversions mentioned in the Bible, the city of Charleston reflects how God’s amazing grace can change the trajectory of a sinful past to a redeeming present and use its recipients to reach the lost.

Find out more at dmcollective.org or contact info@dmcollective.org. Resources are available now and more will be added in the future.