



Out of Africa ... **into Malta**



The Church of Scotland
World Mission Council



OUT OF AFRICA
INTO MALTA

Accompanying Refugees in Malta



Out of Africa ... into Malta is aimed at reshaping the broken lives and families of those who have fled Africa, often in direct fear of their lives, and ended up – not through choice – in Malta. Here they face detention, living conditions in ‘open centres’ branded by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as breaching basic human rights, and rejection by many of the island’s population. For several years, St. Andrew’s Scots Church has sought to serve among Malta’s African immigrants. In recent years, most of those arriving were young men. Some arrived in fear of their lives; many were economic migrants seeking a better life in Europe. St Andrew’s developed practical initiatives, such as teaching English, and providing the men emerging from up to 18 months in detention with the basics of life. Today, the focus of St. Andrew’s Scots Church is particularly on families, including babies and young children.

St Andrew's also, of course, provides a distinctive Christian ministry – “whose we are”. We have a faith to proclaim and a fellowship to share and these are significant parts of “**Out of Africa ... into Malta**”. There has been an assumption that immigrants arriving from North Africa would be Muslim. Although there are two mosques sited in official open centres, there are no similar Christian worship centres or prayer rooms – and Malta is itself 97% Roman Catholic. So St. Andrew's has become a natural focus for many non-Catholic African Christians. Worship and fellowship are important aspects of this accompaniment.

Today the camps and detention centres on Malta are full. Living conditions, particularly for families, are appalling. What should be short-term solutions are turning into longer-term, depressing nightmares, as the boats keep arriving from Libya, and hope of a new life seems to melt away. A number of organisations are involved: the Maltese Government, Red Cross Malta, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and UNHCR.

Malta is the closest point of Europe to Libya. As the fighting ebbed and flowed in the Libyan coastal towns, hundreds have been leaving by boat whenever the opportunity presented itself. As a small independent country, Malta has struggled to absorb the numbers who have arrived, predominantly families, with babies and young children. Many of those arriving have truly harrowing tales to tell. Of those who do, many are Africans from south of the Sahara, who have endured tortuous journeys through war zones, desert, and people trafficking rings just to be put into tents in ‘open centres’ with nothing to their name. It's a very long way indeed from ‘tourist Malta’!

2012-2015 will be crucial years in which concentrated and focused practical work will be able to complete the process of remaking broken lives and families, of healing hurt and perceived rejection, and doing this in the way of Jesus – the one “whom we serve” in all this work. There is a real need to look at integration – moving families in particular out of the tents and cabins of Hal Far and Marsa into wider Maltese society; equipping and enabling them to become financially independent and socially integrated.

There are three key parts to the vision of **Out Of Africa ... Into Malta**. All three will need the prayers of the Guild and of friends around the world. The project will need around £100,000 over the three years. But this is money which will change lives and hearts.



Part 1 – One World Shop



This vision, shared with Red Cross Malta, could involve setting up a charity-type shop, perhaps at Hal Far Open Centre in large Red Cross tents but, once the concept is established, the aim is to move it out into one of Malta's towns where there are already a significant number of African migrants. While the initial stock would be recycled clothes and other materials, we would also encourage the women, in particular, to begin small-scale manufacturing of items for sale through volunteer-run weekly workshops, teaching how to make goods such as bags, hangers and clothes out of old clothes and material. Initial marketing would be through exhibiting at a public event. Red Cross would also offer a small grant to the women to set up their own stall from which they can sell their goods. Longer term there is potential to establish a small factory with a unique product for wider marketing. We have no idea – yet – what that might be!

Part 2 – Malta Microfinance

Many migrants are keen to get a job, move out of the open centres and make a life for themselves. Work offered to migrants is largely manual and unskilled, in construction and tourist-related industries. These jobs are often seasonal or can simply stop on completion of a particular contract. If a migrant moves out of an open centre, shares rent of a flat and then finds his job stops, he can no longer pay his rent and the system does not allow him to move back into an open centre. This fear stops many from even trying. The situation is doubly complicated for families living together in the tents and cabins of Hal Far, where the man will normally be the only potential earner. Malta Microfinance (MM) aims to change this for good.

Microfinance itself is a proven concept worldwide in lifting people out of poverty. MM would serve as a bank to migrants who would be encouraged to save when they work and would pay out loans to cover rent during periods of unemployment, or to buy essentials to help set them up when they move out of an open centre and need bedding, etc., or a small loan to start a business. This, in turn, could feed into the operation of the One World Shop.

Many male immigrants here already have trades: electricians, plumbers, mechanics, plasterers, etc. But, along with the rest of their lives, they've had to leave the tools of their trades behind in fleeing Africa. MM would allow them to invest in their own future by reacquiring the tools to match their skills. It could also allow families to buy school clothes etc. through relatively small loans that would enhance the quality of life which regular banks etc. will not consider due to issues of credit worthiness and security. Given most migrants are Muslim there would be no interest paid on savings or interest charged on loans; charges would be made at the time each loan was made.

www.maltamicrofinance.com



Part 3 – Church Drop-in Centre

St. Andrew's Scots Church has a crypt which is a large, dry, and very useable facility in the heart of Valletta. It would be perfectly possible to use at least part of this as a contact point for Malta Microfinance and even an outlet for the One World Shop, but mainly the aim is to develop it as a drop-in centre where we could undertake our existing English language classes. Using part of the church complex in this way makes sense. It offers our new African Christian friends the chance to come to the church through the week, and firms up the feeling that they are very much a part of Christ's family here.

The Guild support over three years means the core of the project would be secure, and so much more would follow. The Guild support might be multiplied by additional finance from the European Union through refugee and asylum seekers' programmes. Partner organisations in Malta, particularly the Red Cross, Marsa Open Centre, and JRS are already familiar with this opportunity, which has the possibility to double the original seed money.

Guild members will be able to follow developments directly on the St. Andrew's Church, Malta website – www.saintandrewsmalta.com – and would be welcome to visit the church and island to see for themselves the progress with the project.

World Mission Council and St Andrew's Scots Church, Malta working together as part of the Church of Scotland Guild Project Partner Scheme 2012-15, "Whose we are and whom we serve".

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