



ATHENS  
PATRICIA KIRK BISWAS

I STILL REMEMBER his lifeless expression. The face of one of the many homeless, unaccompanied refugee boys that I met the first time I came to Athens. He was about 14 years old and alone in one of the city's biggest parks. He was invisible to everyone around him.

Jesus' words about serving the children and the poor touched my heart in a special way, and Matthew 25:40 kept coming back to me again and again: "... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

At that time, I was a student and was in Athens to conduct a field study as part of my master's thesis in sociology. I was deeply moved by what I had seen and heard and realized that there was a lack of basic protection and care for unaccompanied children who were in Athens as refugees. After finishing my studies, I returned to my hometown in Denmark, but I felt called to return to Greece. I saw the great need and wanted to see how the church could help to meet those needs.

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In 2014, my husband and I moved to Athens to serve and support unaccompanied children. Through a friend, we were introduced to Tim Coomar and Alexandros Pipilios, pastors of Exarcheia Church. They had just planted the church a year before and shared a common heart and calling to serve some of the most vulnerable children in the city. In the beginning, we were working out of the church's offices while finding and supporting children and youth on the streets.

That same year we established a Christian non-profit organization in order to better help these children and youth. We named the organization "Faros," which translates to "lighthouse" in Greek: a sign that one is nearing a safe haven. The dream was to create a space where these children could be safe, discover their worth and find hope for the future.

Shortly thereafter, we managed to rent a run-down computer shop that we transformed into a drop-in center so that the children had a safe space away from the streets and the parks. One year later, in 2015, was the start of the major refugee crisis, and within that year about one million





PATRICIA AND HER HUSBAND DAN are members of Exarcheia Church. Exarcheia is often considered the Anarchist quarter of Athens. Tim Coomar and Alexandros Pipilos started the church in 2013 after attending CTC's International Intensive training in New York City in 2008. Please pray for their work in Athens with unaccompanied minors, that God will provide all that they need and that they will be able to help provide protection, hope and a future for these children and youth.

refugees arrived in Greece. Since then we have started a number of additional programs including a shelter for unaccompanied children, a women's center and a vocational training center. Today we have established strong relations with other organizations in the field. We also collaborate with and receive support from the government. We now regularly support about 100 unaccompanied children and youth every day in the different programs.

We are now again seeing increased needs of unaccompanied children, and just since last summer, the number of lone children has increased from 3,000 to more than 5,000. Three out of four are without access to a shelter, and one quarter are missing, homeless or living in precarious conditions. Many have fled conflict, lost family members, and been away from home for months, even years. They are at such great risk of harm and exploitation. They have so many struggles in their lives and wonder if anyone cares for them at all. They feel like giving up.

It requires a lot of intensive care and love to move someone from a place of such risk to a position of safety and belonging. At Faros, we work holistically and take responsibility for each child and youth, providing individual care, love and professional help. Instead of merely a specific service, we want to help them build relationships and provide support for them that they will still have even when no longer under our care.

We often return to the parable of the Good Samaritan, seeing ourselves as the innkeeper who received the wounded man. This is our calling: to serve and love the broken that God brings to our doorstep.

