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**Countries: Holland, Europe**

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Last month, Dutch pastor Derk Stegeman finally concluded a 97 day, 24-hour per day “mass marathon” at the Hague’s Bethel Church. The exceptionally long church service was a legal and clerical experiment to protect Hayarpi Tamrazyan, an Armenian refugee that has lived in the Netherlands for nine years. After being denied political asylum, she and her family were facing deportation.

Eventually, it was successful—at the end of January, Tamrazyan and her family were granted the right to remain in the Netherlands.

How did it work? According to Dutch law, police—including immigration officers—cannot enter a place of worship during an ongoing religious service. Pastor Stegemen reasoned that a never-ending church service could protect Tamrazyan and her family, and organized other religious leaders and volunteers to shelter them while keeping the service going no matter what. The result was a continuous service of various pastors passing the baton to perform ceremonies in a variety of different languages for almost one hundred days. Dutch and international media—namely US outlets such as CBS, CNN, and the New York Times—extensively covered the story with interviews from Stegeman and other organisers of the mass service. However, it was noticeably absent from widely-read Christian publications such as the *Catholic Herald*, and the Vatican City daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, nor was it mentioned in the major US Christian magazine, *Charisma*. Why would the Christian media avoid a positive story that highlights the humanitarian potential of the Catholic church?

One potential reason is the highly politicized discussion surrounding migrants in Europe. As Parliamentary elections approach in May, far-right political parties leverage fear around migration to gain seats, and power. In some instances, they leverage Christianity, and religious tradition to argue why migrants should not be allowed to seek asylum in Europe. Recently, Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini has become infamous for waving a rosary while condemning foreign migrants, and pushing an “Italians first” narrative.

However, as is evidenced by the Hague’s “mass marathon,” actual religious leaders are preaching and practicing quite differently. Many Christians around Europe--the very people that the far-right is trying to galvanize--are responding positively.

“The reason why we did this was quite sad and depressing ... but it was also a really big gift to this parish and to the church in the Hague,” Axel Wicke, a Dutch Christian leader heavily involved in organizing the mass told *Christianity Today*’s “Quick To Listen” podcast.

“I still get messages along the line, ‘Finally, I know why there is a church,’” he continued. “It was a very fundamental way of recognizing, ‘That’s what the church is for.’”

Christian support for migrants is also evidenced in newspaper sales. Italian newspaper *Avvenire* has seen an increase in their sales due to their dedication to covering issues facing migrants, and *Famiglia Cristiana* was praised when its journalists criticized Salvini and the Italian far-right, earning the Christianity-affiliated paper a reputation of being “ultra-left.”

Politically, the “mass marathon” is also making noise. Tamrazyan’s amnesty comes as Mark Rutte’s government’s coalition partners, the centre-right VVD, progressive D66 and Christian CDA and Christian Union) debate the future of *kinderpardon*, a dispensation available to families who have been in the Netherlands for five years or longer. The success of the service has pushed the Dutch government to review denied asylum requests of approximately 700 minors.

It is not the first time that the Church has played a pivotal role in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. In Italy, the St. Edgido community has coordinated with the Federation of Evangelical Churches, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches and the government to implement humanitarian corridors since 2016, for Syrians and then Ethiopians. Prominent Christian leaders like Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby have routinely publicly supported migrants, refugees and asylum seekers’ rights since the beginning of the so-called “refugee crisis.”

However, many Christian media outlets are still remaining silent on these matters. Despite the Christian legacy of caring for migrants and refugees, the increasing prominence of the far-right politicizes the issue, discouraging media outlets and the public from following the approaches of truly Christian leaders like Pope Francis or Pastor Stegemen, further complicating life for migrants and refugees attempting to forge a life in Europe.