



Hope Away from Home

**June 25 Methodist/Presbyterian
July 2 Anglican**

Introduction



A woman walks through the rubble in Kyiv after bombing.

operationrefugee.nz

The United Nations marks World Refugee Day on June 20. In the Methodist and Presbyterian calendar, churches will stand with refugees on June 25 this year. Anglican churches have designated July 2 for Refugee Sunday.

Hope Away from Home includes stories, reflections, notes on the Bible readings for both Sundays, prayers and actions to assist your church or group to focus on the needs of people seeking safety and shelter in our world today.

"Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me..."
Matthew 10:40a

Refugee Sunday is a time to stand with people who have been displaced by conflict and persecution. We remember all people who have fled from trouble in our prayers and with action. By sharing what we can, we show love for our neighbours and participate in the task of remaking God's world into a place where every person can live in dignity and peace. God's love for every single person lies at the core of our faith.

The Search for Safety

It is not easy to register as a refugee with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), even if you can make it to one of its offices. The journey is likely to have its own dangers with no guarantee of success or safety. Crossing the border is only the first step in what can be a very long process to reach safety.

Somehow new refugees must find food, shelter and the support necessary to survive until they can get approval. The applicant must tell the right story that proves their case to a sometimes jaded official after months of waiting. If they do not and their story is rejected, hope disappears quickly. It is the exact opposite of the welcome that Jesus described in Matthew.

If we took our responsibility to love our neighbour seriously, there would not be a refugee crisis. Borders would not be closed. People uprooted by war or persecution would find shelter and the support they needed to recover.

Refugees are more likely to be blamed for their vulnerability than accepted for the human beings they are.

On Refugee Sunday, we invite you to think about the people who happen to be refugees through no fault of their own.

If you can, choose a challenge and join this Year's Operation Refugee.



Mother and child leave in haste.

Refugee Story



Living with Dignity in Poland

Nataliia and her two grandchildren Lia aged 8 (pictured above) and Timur live with six other families in a converted house in Bielsko-Biala, Poland. Each family has their own room and they share the kitchen, dining room and living spaces. The families support each other where they can.

When the war broke out, the family stayed in Zaporizhzhia close to Ukraine's nuclear power plant. But in September 2022, Timur aged 10 went to buy milk and was almost hit by a shell. Half a year later, he still recalls every detail of the experience. Timur tells his story in a quiet voice:

"I heard explosions and rode my bike very fast. I saw a crowd of people. I came closer, and I saw a person lying in blood.

People cried, and there was broken glass everywhere. A tree was burning in the city centre. The explosion had thrown a man's

dog away. An ambulance came and took the person that was lying there. He was a power plant worker, and people said he died." The children began to build Lego checkpoints after that experience says his grandmother.

Having a space to live and being close to other Ukrainian families is a great relief, says Nataliia. She has been the children's caregiver for the past five years. At home, she's supported by her son and her family. Now the family is scattered: her daughter's family is in the Netherlands and her son, the children's father, is in the army. "I cannot be ill. I am now mother, father, and grandmother to them," she says. She also watches a friend of Timur's after school while his mother works.

The hostel is part of the work done by our partner the Lutheran World Federation to assist refugees from Ukraine. It is also supported by local churches.

Readings for June 25

Genesis 21: 8-21

When one reads the story from a child's eyes, we can see the vulnerability hiding underneath the familiar words. Reading this story from the perspective of the baby Ishmael, it is hard to avoid the way God cared for Ishmael and his mother, even though God appeared to give permission to Abraham to cast them out (v.12). The promise to Hagar in v.8 parallels the one for Isaac.

According to the book of Genesis, the two sons of Abraham Isaac and Ishmael narrowly escaped death. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. Soon their water ran out, and Hagar laid Ishmael under a bush, not wanting to see her son die.

In the next chapter of Genesis, we read the detailed story of Abraham taking Isaac to Mount Moriah where he prepared to offer him as a burnt offering to God.

Both stories seem very cruel - whether Abraham was banishing Hagar and Ishmael at his wife Sarah's insistence or God's command to kill his remaining son, Isaac.

Reading the story from Isaac or Ishmael's perspective can help us connect with the fear and uncertainty that is the lived experience of people who have been uprooted by war and persecution.

Psalms 86: 1-10, 16-17

Read this psalm as though it was a refugee's prayer - a family trying to escape conflict in Sudan or a young man isolated and depressed trying to survive in a foreign place.



Nataliia cooks in the shared kitchen.

Romans 6: 1-11

Paul wrote of the transformation made possible when we choose to follow the Jesus way. These words challenge the reader to examine our hearts and minds. What do we need to leave behind? How do we "walk in [the] newness of life" (v. 4.c) and respond to our world where so many people are denied dignity?

Matthew 10: 24-39

Matthew wrote for people whose world was defined by family. To leave its protection and support could put a person in great danger - a fear that many refugees know and experience.

Matthew wrote to Christians who could not rely on their family or community for food and protection. Following Jesus offers a new way, a freedom of finding life (v.39). Such a life is marked by God's love as for a sparrow (v. 31).

We can live with confidence as we seek to change the systems and practices that destroy life and deny dignity.

Readings for July 2

Genesis 22: 1-14

Like Ishmael, Isaac came close to death. He sets out with his father on an expedition to Mount Moriah. Reading the story from Isaac's perspective, one can see the trust he had in his father. The long trek must have felt like an adventure, a chance for Isaac to be with his Dad. Little did he know what could so easily have happened.

The storytelling is vivid. There is no escaping from its cruelty. It is easy to imagine Isaac tied to the altar and his father picking up his knife. We are used to reading the story as one of Abraham's obedience but on Refugee Sunday focusing on Isaac allows us to explore his vulnerability.

Psalms 13

Psalms 13 is one of lament. It opens with words that could be the cry of a refugee and affirms faith in God.

Romans 6: 12-23

Paul's readers were familiar with slavery and the loyalty it demanded. Today our allegiances and interests may be less obvious to us. Paul's words challenge us to leave behind the loyalties that bind us and instead look to God for freedom (v.22-23).

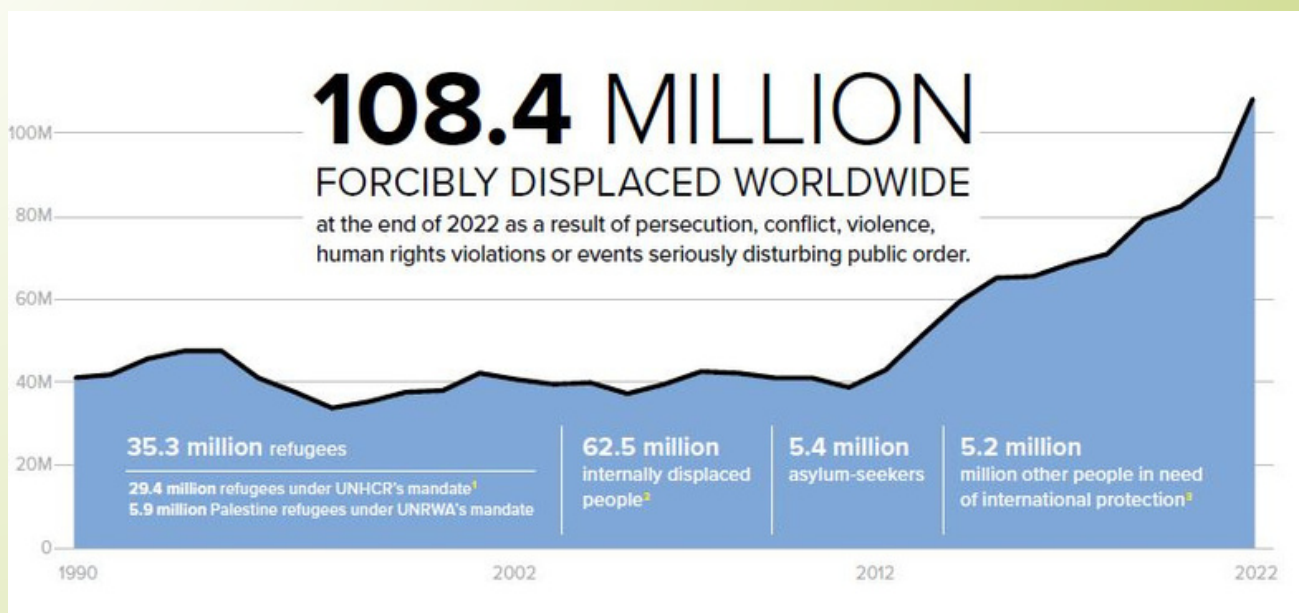
Matthew 10: 40-42

Hospitality is at the heart of this text.

Making people feel welcome and included is central to our faith in Christ. Matthew's words can be read literally - offering a cup of cold water is life-giving and is the least we can do.

Lia eats a snack in the shared kitchen.





UNHCR released the [Global Trends Report](#) on June 14. 52% of refugees have come from Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan. In 2022, the war in Ukraine was the top driver of displacement.

More than 1 in 74 people had to flee last year.

Of 35.3 million refugees, 70 % are hosted in neighbouring countries.

40% of displaced people are children, under the age of 18. Of the total world's population, 30% are children.

The conflict in Sudan has displaced more people this year. By May, UNHCR [estimates](#) the number had risen to 110 million by May,

62.5 million are displaced within their own country

Prayers and Music

Prayers



Loving God.

Give us the strength to challenge what is not right,
The courage to stand alongside those who are hurting,
The hope to believe that justice will come.
Amen.

May we find the courage to listen to the stories of people who have suffered and been forced to leave their homes.
May we welcome warmly those who have been displaced and are afraid.
May we share what we can with people who need food, water, shelter and care.
In Jesus' Name we pray.
Amen.

God our protector
We pray for people who have fled in fear,
for people who are on dangerous journeys,
for people who are stuck or living in limbo.
Guide them and keep them safe.

May refugees and displaced people find pathways of hope and warm spaces where there is food and care.
May they be treated fairly and not be exploited by people along the way.
May countries give them shelter and a chance to build their own lives.

We pray for ourselves that we can discover new reservoirs of hospitality, offer cool water to a stranger, stand with refugees - the people you love.
Amen.

Other Resources

The United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR has stories and information.

Christian World Service is a member of ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) which responds to humanitarian situations and works to strengthen affected communities.

Music



- Welcome Home – Dave Dobbyn
<https://youtu.be/Wlz2uEuxyyk>
- [WOV10 All People that on Earth do Dwell](#)
- WOV666 Make me O Lord an instrument of your peace
- AA God of freedom, God of Justice [Shirley Murray](#)
- AA 158 Who is my mother?
[Shirley Murray](#)
- This Little Light of Mine
- [We pray for Afghanistan's People Today](#) Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Credits

Thanks to Albin Hillert, LWF
AID Rom Romania
ACT Alliance
Hungarian Interchurch Aid
Lutheran World Federation

For Children

Make A Game

Distribute squares of paper marked with a 10 x 10 grid or make one large square to do the activity as a group. Depending on time, you may want to write the numbers from 1 - 100 to make a Board for Snakes and Ladders. Have some cut out snakes and ladders ready or ask the children to draw them in.

Ask what makes them feel welcome when they come to church or school and what makes them feel sad. Mark the squares with snakes or ladders accordingly and then play the game.

End with a round of happy singing and share special food.

Timur cannot forget the bombing of his home town.

All Age Activity

How do you make people welcome?

- Cut out a lot of heart shapes with room to write or draw.
- Supply pens or pencils.

Jesus taught us to make people feel welcome. I want you to meet Lia who is eight years old and Timur who is 10. They live with their grandmother in a hostel with other refugee families in Poland. Imagine they come to our church.

How would you make them welcome?

What might you give them? Talk to your neighbour and then write or draw your gifts and actions on a heart as a love offering for refugees.





Mohammad's Story:

Twice a Refugee

Mohammad Hosein lives with his wife and infant daughter in Bucharest, Romania, where he has just found permanent accommodation.

Mohammad is also a refugee. Twice over.

Originally from Afghanistan, he was a TV reporter in 2021, but fled the country in August after the Taliban took control. He and his pregnant wife drove 30 hours to the border at Chernyski, a drive which would ordinarily take just 7 hours. While they were safe in Ukraine, the same could not be said for Mohammad's family. His father is a judge, and has been beaten by the Taliban because of his work.

The couple settled in Odessa, where they welcomed their daughter into the world. Mohammad received permanent resident status in Ukraine.

A few months later, their lives were upended when war broke out. They fled to Romania and were treated in the same way as others from Ukraine. They wanted to go to Germany to be with other family members.

Without a Ukrainian passport, they could not go further. They stayed in Radaout for a month, then moved to Bucharest. "We were staying in a camp near the immigration office. But it was not clean. When I told the local ACT Alliance staff that we had a newborn baby, they invited us to stay here [in small apartments for families seeking asylum in Romania]."

"ACT Alliance is always helping us," says Mohammad. "They give us food - chicken, rice, yogurt. They host activities to introduce us to Bucharest, and they help us legally."

Mohammad and his family now have refugee status. "But I am not going to Germany," he said. "I need to support my family. We receive 200 euros per person from the Romanian immigration, and I send 100 to my family."

He wants to bring his father to Bucharest because it is so dangerous in Afghanistan at the moment. **"I don't know how we can do it, but I hope immigration will help. He is not safe."**

Home

Warsan Shire is a Somali poet born in Kenya. She lives in London.

Listen to the poem on Youtube,

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as
well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin
factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases
you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of
doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem
under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport
toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going
back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land

cws.org.nz



no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the
stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles
travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching

....

no one leaves home until home is a
sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave.

run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here.

operationrefugee.nz



20 JUNE

World Refugee Day

**GET SPONSORED TO
COMPLETE A CHALLENGE**

STAND WITH REFUGEES

[http://](http://OperationRefugee.nz)  **OperationRefugee.nz**



Winter Walk

Walk or wheel 10km, or a distance that you find challenging.



Shelter Challenge

Put up a tent or make a shelter out of found materials and spend the night inside.



Food for Life

Eat simple rations for a day. You can try out some of our purpose made recipes.

On World Refugee Day, we want to stand with refugees and raise as much money as we can to help as many refugees as we can meet their most urgent needs. Most refugees end up in neighbouring countries. You can help individuals and families who have fled Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria or Ukraine by taking part in this year's Operation Refugee challenges. You can do your challenge on World Refugee Day (June 20) or a time that works for you. **[Find out how you can help.](#)**

