



God of Compassion

June 23 Methodist/Presbyterian
July 7 Anglican

Introduction

The United Nations marks World Refugee Day on June 20. In the Methodist and Presbyterian calendar, churches will stand with refugees on June 23 this year. Anglican churches designate July 7 as Refugee Sunday. You may like to invite someone who has been a refugee to share in your service.

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

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

On Refugee Sunday we stand with people displaced by conflict and persecution. We reflect on our responsibility to welcome the stranger, and the conflict and poverty that drive rapidly increasing global migration. It is a time to remember all people who have been forced from their homes in your prayers and with action. By sharing with them and working to enhance human dignity and peace, we live as neighbours in God's world.

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A refugee family from Ukraine walks to a bus stop in Slovakia. LWF/Albin Hillert.

Living as Neighbours in God's World



During Covid, Uwasse listened to her lessons on the radio. She lives in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in southwest Uganda, Most residents are from the Congo.

Photo: FCA/Hugh Rutherford

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People have always travelled, traded and been forced from their homes. When there is not enough food, space and opportunity, tensions can grow between individuals and communities. Some exploit them for their own political and economic gain. Today, the pressure on people and the environment is great. More people than ever are on the move and the consequences can be more dangerous.

Throughout our Scriptures, there are many stories and verses, reminding us of our obligations to welcome the stranger and to share food, water, shelter to those in need. We can do this in our own neighbourhood and through our support of Christian World Service to people living in the countries closest to such conflicts.

Our world is a place of richness and diversity where people and communities can live as neighbours and with care for the creation. God's world is sustained by love but broken by violence and greed. Climate change is already feeding some of the conflicts that drive people from their homes in fear for their lives. We need to speak out now for a fairer world with justice at its core.

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Refugee Story



When war broke out in Syria, Samer (pictured above) and his family fled to Lebanon. It was a traumatic experience for the eighth grade student.

“I felt lost and confused with no dreams,” he said.

The teenager soon dropped out of school. After missing more than a year, he decided to give school another try. This time he went to the school at the Sidon Centre run by our partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) Lebanon. He was so impressed by the teachers, that he worked hard to catch up on the years he had missed. Samer went on to pass the baccalaureate exams which
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required travelling back into Syria. DSPR Lebanon organises the three week trip each year. It is the only opportunity for refugees to sit the exams and return to Lebanon - normally once refugees leave they are not allowed back into the country. Samer then studied media and communications at a university in Lebanon, before securing a job as a translator in the Netherlands.

Samer has nothing but praise for the work of DSPR Lebanon and wants others to have the opportunities he had through its education programmes. Refugees know that education is can be a passport to survival.

*Read **more**. Watch **Samer**.*

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Readings for June 23

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

The story of David is one we know well. Without armour David takes on Goliath, the giant. Using his own skill, tenacity, resources and the sense of God being with him equipping him for the task, David defeats the giant. The setting for this story is a battle. Seldom does one read interpretations of this story that have any sympathy with Goliath. If David had been defeated, would he have gone on to be king?

Like David refugees have often experienced a high level of conflict. Many have lost family, friends and their livelihoods. With them, they bring their dreams for safety and a new life but also trauma and sometimes physical injuries.

Psalm 9:9-20

The meaning of this psalm is unmistakable. God is the stronghold of the oppressed (v.9). He saves us from death (v.15). He has not forgotten the needy and gives hope to the poor forever (v.20). On this basis nations shall be judged.

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

In writing to the Corinthians Paul was clear that God does not share God's grace in vain (v.1). We can open ourselves to allow God's grace to work through us and in times of challenge (v.4-10).

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"DSPR Lebanon makes us unbreakable. Attending the Sabra Centre gave me hope in life again. We lost a lot of hope, energy and power [because of the war]."

Ahreej, refugee from Syria

Mark 4:35-41

The passage begins with words from Jesus, 'let us go across to the other side'. Ched Myers (and others) in *Say to this Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship*, (1996, Orbis Books) notes Jesus and his disciples 'cross over' several times in Mark. "From Mark's point of view, they were going to Gentile territory, symbolising everything alien and threatening to the Jewish population west of the Sea. The function of this crossing pattern is to dramatise the fact that, despite their cultural and political 'otherness', Mark's Jesus is determined to bring liberation to those on the other side." (p. 56). The very forces of nature cannot prevent Jesus from going to 'the others' in order to share his message of liberation.

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Readings for July 7

Ezekiel 2: 1-5

In this passage, the heavenly and earthly worlds meet. At the end of chapter 1, Ezekiel reported he fell to the ground on seeing the splendour of the Lord. In v.2, he is told to stand up on his feet. Overwhelmed by God's presence, he cannot stand by himself. God picked Ezekiel up and then commissioned him to instruct the people of Israel, a nation of rebels (v.3). God assigned this 'Mortal' to be a priest and a prophet to the people. In this encounter, he accepts the challenging responsibility of changing hearts and minds.

Psalms 123

This is a psalm for us as a community that has not done enough for refugees.

Refugee children prepare to shape dough in the library of DSPR Lebanon.

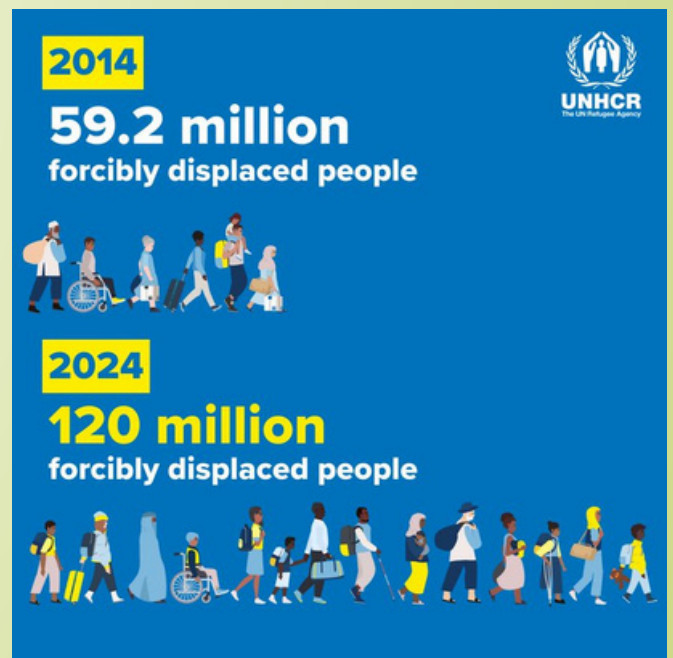
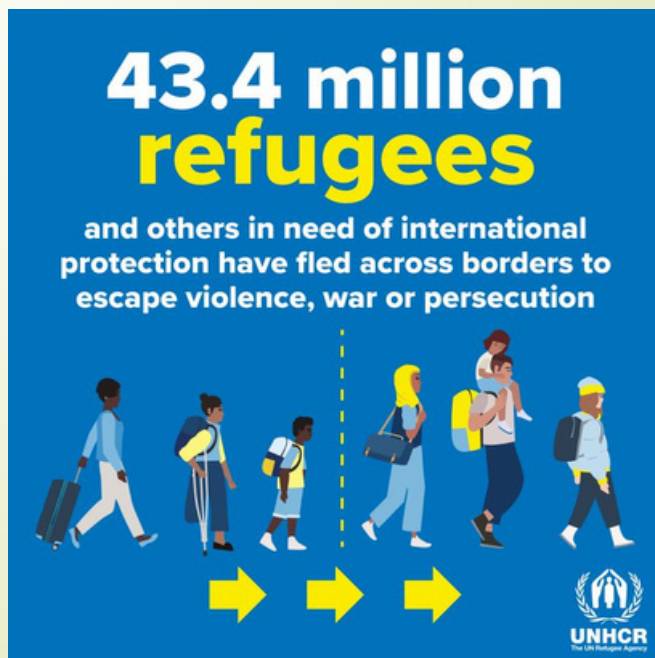


2 Corinthians 12:2-10

The words of Paul challenge the dominant messages of today. They contrast sharply with the modern emphasis on strength and hero images. Showing weakness is discouraged today. In contrast Paul says he boasts of his thorn in the flesh because it is an opportunity for "Christ to dwell in me" (v.6). It sounds simple enough to speak of our weaknesses but it is much harder to do!

Mark 6: 1-13

Theologian Walter Brueggemann talks about the two-fold task of the prophet: truth-telling and hope-bringing. Truth-telling is not always appreciated. Here Jesus leads by example and then sends the disciples out to preach the gospel to whoever is open to hearing it. Hope grows from speaking truth.



UNHCR released the Global Trends Report on June 13. At the end of 2023 UNHCR estimated 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced. By the end of April 2024, it estimated the number had reached more than 200 million.

The largest number of internally displaced people are in Sudan: 9.1 million.

6.4 million people have been displaced from Syria and Afghanistan each.

 At the end of 2023, almost 3 in 4 forcibly displaced people were living in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards.

 Nearly 1 in 2 were living in countries where they also remained exposed to conflict.

More than 1 in 69 people in the world have been displaced.



Prayers and Music

God of compassion, as we are grateful for our homes, our heaters and kitchen cupboards with food, we cry out to you for those people forced to leave their homes. People who are living in cramped, unsafe and stressful situations, displaced from their homes. Some are waiting for safe times to return, others cannot return and need a place to dwell in safety. God our hearts ache for what they are facing. We cry to you Lord for the many kinds of help they need wherever they are.

We cry for change. We ask for You to bring an end to war and conflict. We pray you work in the hearts of those who have the power to end war. Breathe peace in their hearts, Jesus. We pray for peacemakers working to end conflict, and alleviate suffering, that their efforts would have great success. We pray that our Government and Governments with power would have great courage and skill to advocate for peace and humanitarian aid.

Lord, you know every heart. Where people experiencing refugee journeys feel stuck and have lost hope, may you restore their hope and bear their burdens.

We cry for our nation to respond to those seeking our help with incredible generosity. We pray for our Government and organisations working to help people currently facing refugee journeys, that they would act with care. Sustain and revive their staff we pray who may be overcome by their work. May we as a nation increase the resources for those coming from refugee-backgrounds in New Zealand. We pray for the new Community

Refugee Sponsorship Scheme here to flourish.

We cry out for your heart of love to be born in us. Help our communities act generously to those who have resettled in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thinking of the community we live in, we ask you God to pour our your creative generosity towards those from refugee-backgrounds in our midst. Give us eyes to see the creative everyday actions that make a difference to those who have experienced a refugee journey.

We pray for the children of these families to have good friends at school. We pray for adults in our community to have opportunities to increase their language skills, and for employers to have the courage to offer people their first jobs here. We acknowledge the people they miss overseas.

Stir our hearts to be the kind of friends and neighbours you imagine Lord. Jesus Christ, you knew what it was to flee persecution as a child, we join you in interceding for those who face this now. Amen.

Music



- Welcome Home – Dave Dobbyn _
- WOV666 Make me O Lord an instrument of your peace
- AA God of freedom, God of Justice Shirley Murray
- It is well with my Soul - Audrey Assad
- Amazing Grace



Job Opportunities needed in Aotearoa

For many people from refugee backgrounds in Aotearoa, getting a first shot at paid employment or a stint of voluntary work in a friendly supportive environment makes an enormous difference to well-being and future job prospects. It can be a massive hurdle when the job market is tight. Language support programmes are linked with job placement services in many centres. They are always crying out for friendly employers or organisations that can support a person in their first steps in employment or volunteering.

A year ago, the Victoria University Chaplaincy at Wellington had a crisis. "Our new \$2 Cafe initiative for students was going unexpectedly well, and our current team just couldn't keep up with the hospo demand," says Rev Mel McKenzie, Supervising Chaplain at Victoria. "We were desperate for a reliable part-time kitchen hand and I suddenly remembered the need I'd experienced in a former life working at a programme that supported people from refugee backgrounds to get their first job. I contacted KiwiClass on a Thursday and had a new staff member on my team by the following Monday! A Noun had not worked in New Zealand before starting his first job in the Chaplaincy's friendly student cafe. He started on 6 hours a week and increasing to 10 hours. He picked up the Chaplaincy's cleaning contract as he became more familiar with the environment.

"He is an incredible worker. Super punctual, nothing is a problem. We have a great time. I want to challenge other businesses led by Christians and faith-based community organisations out there - even if it's for a small job, short-term or even voluntary role - to consider creative opportunities to support people from refugee backgrounds into employment or through work experience. For us it's been a wonderful opportunity to learn a little bit about another person's journey and to gain a fantastic staff member. It feels like one practical step we can take to put our faith into action. The first step is to contact community-based language programmes in your area and talk to them about who they might have in their classes who would be up for a shot at a job or experience. It's SO worth it," concludes Mel.

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.

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Credits

**Thanks to Rev Mel McKenzie for
the prayer and story
Albin Hillert, LWF
DSPR Lebanon/JCC
Hugh Rutherford, FCA
Lutheran World Federation**

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STAND WITH REFUGEES

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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.

TAKE UP A CHALLENGE

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 where there are few resources and many people who need them. You can help individuals and families from Palestine, Syria or Ukraine by taking part in this year's Operation Refugee challenges. You can do your challenge at a time that works for you.

Walk the talk and raise funds to help.

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