



Photo: [UNRWA](#): [Refugees](#) queuing for first food distribution in 6 months, Yarmouk Camp, Damascus.

“Please give me a little Water from your Jar” Gen:24:43c

World Refugee Sunday Resources 2014

World Refugee Day was first celebrated on 20 June, 2001 by the [United Nations Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR) to recognise the contributions of forcibly displaced people throughout the world. CWS invites you to remember the plight of the refugee on the closest Sunday, this year 22 June (Resources [here](#)) or on 6 July in the Anglican tradition. These lectionary appropriate resources can be adapted for your congregation or used for private reflection.

*A **refugee** is a person who ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.’*

United Nations Convention on Refugees, 1951

"Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

UNHCR

Pray for Displaced People

Giving hospitality to the homeless, the traveller and stranger is at the core of the Judeo-Christian tradition. From the time of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar wandering in the desert to the present day, millions of people have fled their homes and countries. UNHCR [reports](#) there were 11,703,179 refugees, 23,925,555 internally displaced people and nearly 43 million of concern in December 2013.

Many people of Syria, Palestine and South Sudan join the long list of those who have fled their homes. In Syria the country is crumbling under the pressure of violence and sectarian strife. Another round of failing peace talks on the situation of Palestine and Israel gives no hint of a pathway forward for Palestinian refugees. In South Sudan deep seated rivalries have spurred brutal violence, hunger and a flood of refugees.

CWS is asking churches to join in prayer and action for displaced people. CWS partners the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, Maridi Service Agency and other [ACT Alliance](#) members are doing their best to help. They need our prayers and support.



An Update on Syria

Last year's Refugee Sunday [resources](#) included a short summary of the conflict in Syria. Since then the situation has worsened. June's elections consolidated President Assad's control although many could or did not vote. His military forces are the best equipped. [Rebels](#) have fragmented into many different groups and are fighting for territory even within the rebel-held areas. They control much of the north and east of the country including some of the oil producing areas. They also control some southern areas close to Jordan and the Golan Heights. Assad's military has regained control of Homs and the road to Damascus.

The UN Security Council's efforts to improve humanitarian access have met with little success. So far resolutions have failed to alleviate much of the suffering of civilians. On a daily basis Syrians are making tough choices about how to stay alive in a war zone. The conflict is unsettling and costly for neighbouring countries hosting refugees - Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. These countries are carrying a heavy financial and social burden—the global community is providing some support.

CWS partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) is helping Palestinian refugees who have been resident in Syria as well as Syrian refugees. Most are eking out a living in cramped quarters outside the camps set up for them. Often work is illegal as hosting governments have banned them from employment to discourage them from staying. Children have been shattered by their experiences. They have lost home, school, stability and often loved ones. In Jordan 65% of 8-14 year olds show signs of stress: bedwetting, inwardness, sudden outbursts, epileptic fits and learning difficulties. Knowing how important it is for their long term future, DSPR is making sure as many as possible have a chance to be children. They are organising very popular children's forums—special days where the children play games, learn and have fun together.

With 600 new refugees arriving in Jordan each day, the strain only increases. DSPR Jordan for example is able to assist—in the last two months they have distributed 600 relief parcels for about 1600 Syrians, but they would like to help more of those asking for assistance. In addition to the children's forums they are running Mother support groups, psychosocial programmes, health training and civic education. Many refugees are women who need to learn new skills to manage in very difficult contexts. Away from their communities they rely on each other's support to deal with all that they have experienced.

Facts on Syria

Population	21.4 million
People in Need	9.3 million
Displaced Palestinians in Syria	270,000
Refugees in neighbour countries	2,814,000
Syrian—Palestinian refugees	75,000



Children's Talk ([PowerPoint](#) available)

Here are children from a faraway country. Syria is very dangerous. There has been three years of fighting and there is no end in sight. It became so scary the children's parents decided they needed to leave. Refugees are people who have had to leave their home and their country.

In Syria the children used to go to school, play and do things together. Now they live in tents and life is a whole lot tougher. When it rains too much they cannot go out and sometimes they do not have enough to eat. Many have lost family and friends.

That's why the Saturday children's forums are very popular. The children learn, play together, make new friends and have some fun. They are run by the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees who know what refugees need.

New Zealanders give money to Christian World Service to help the refugees. Helping people was very important to Jesus. He shared food, healed sick people and stood up for people who were being picked on. In Matthew 25:43 Jesus told us "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Helping refugees is one way churches help strangers and therefore follow Jesus's teaching. We can pray for refugees and give money to help. (If you want to, ask the group for ideas to raise money for Syrians. St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Blenheim held a sausage sizzle over two weeks last year for Syrian refugees.) A simple worksheet is also available.

Loving God, We pray for children and their families from Syria. Keep them safe and give them the food they need. May the fighting stop and peace begin. Amen.

"I lost hope and was desperate and afraid, but being a member of DSPR committee gave me the confidence and the knowledge of how to deal with my children in their crisis".

Mrs. Fareedah Kan'an a Syrian woman and member of the Syrian Jordanian Committee

Lectionary Readings

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Rebekah comes from Nahor (v10), a city in upper Mesopotamia (north eastern Syria). She is a confident and clever young woman, not afraid to speak to strangers or to provide water for their camels. She arrives home from the well resplendent in gold (v22), given to her by Abraham's servant sent to find his son Isaac a wife. Laban her brother goes out to meet the servant and offers hospitality: straw and fodder for the camels and water for washing (v32). The servant declines to eat the food Laban gives to him until he has made what is effectively a marriage proposal (v35-38). It was an arranged marriage but Rebekah is asked for her agreement (v58). They return to Isaac in the Beer-lahai-roi in the Negev, a distance of 800-900 kms. Isaac is pleased to take her as his wife (v 67).

Psalms 45:10-17

In contrast to the story of Rebekah, this psalm focuses on the king rather than the princess. In this royal psalm the place of the king as the representative and mediator of the divine order is obvious. The king desires the princess for her beauty (v 11). The princess and virgins are to go to the king dressed in many colours and to give joy and gladness to him (v15). It ends with blessing and praise for the king throughout the generations (v17).

Romans 7:15-25a

This is Paul's third example of freedom (after the widow and the slave in the previous verses). Here joining the 'Jesus community' offers freedom from possession. A person possessed by sin can no longer do what she/he wants (v18). Willpower is not enough to overcome it. Romans 8: 1-2 is the conclusion of this section, showing how a person can overcome his/her internal contradictions through the grace of God.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Matthew relays the reactions to Jesus's message in v16-19. They did not like John's message either—preferring to live as they have always lived. Matthew makes his final point in v19 saying that events will show that Jesus's message will prove to be wise.

In v25 Jesus is the mediator or spokesperson of God. The message is revealed to the infants or 'simple folk'. For peasant farmers the yoke provides an immediate connection. They would understand the physical reality and their bondage to the wealthy landowner who forces them to work and pay taxes. Jesus is inviting them to change their allegiance, to leave behind their exhaustion from heavy labour and obligation to follow him. In a time where the means of survival relied on someone else, this is a major challenge to the status quo. Living the unfamiliar is not an easy choice. Nobody wants to be a refugee.

Prayer for Refugees

Loving God

We pray for the stranger, for the refugee we will never meet, for the family who has lost father, mother, sister and brother, for the mother who has left food on the table and a garden growing, for the father who has left the security of his community seeking safety in the unknown, for the children who have left the familiarity of school and playground.

God of the Wilderness

We pray for all people, may they find the strength, hope and peace that comes from you and in our lives together.

We pray for those who instil fear and hatred in people's hearts. May their voices be stilled and their clamour for war put aside. We pray for peacemakers—people who can build community rather than armies, who can stop violence that breeds more violence, and broker peace rather than war.

God of the Battlezone

We pray for all people, may they find the strength, hope and peace that comes from you and in our lives together.

We pray for the people of Syria, Palestine, South Sudan and every place where people have been forced from their homes. When they cry out for food, for shelter and for safety, may someone be there to come to their aid. Help us to respond to people in their need, listening to their stories and hearing from them what matters most. We pray for the work of ACT Alliance members as they share food, shelter, water, healthcare, education, and community support in places where violence and deprivation are rife.

God of the Unknown

We pray for all people, may they find the strength, hope and peace that comes from you and in our lives together. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen

Anyuak and her five year old daughter Arual cook food. After the long walk, they are living in a camp for displaced people in South Sudan. Photo: ACT/P Jeffrey





Children enjoy water from a new pump installed by ACT Alliance.
Photo: ACT/P Jeffrey

Please give generously to the [Syria Appeal](#) to help families survive.

CWS Responds to Syria Need

CWS is appealing for funds to help long term partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) respond to the needs of growing numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. They have rapidly expanded services to the new refugee communities. Funds raised in this appeal will help provide rent subsidies, school costs, essential food, hygiene and clothing supplies, and programmes like the

children's forums and Mother Support Groups. ACT Alliance members are giving practical help in Syria.

Growing Crisis in South Sudan

Continuing tensions in [South Sudan](#) are undermining food security and people's lives in the world's newest country. Violence broke out in the capital Juba on 15 December 2013 and quickly spread to several other states. Within weeks, thousands of people had been killed or wounded in the ensuing violence. Despite signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement on 23 January 2014, fighting between Government and opposition forces continued, especially in Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states.

A new interim agreement was reached in May and discussions continue in an effort to reach a more workable form of government. Issues that had been put aside at independence in 2011 have come to the surface, and it is hoped talks will help them find a way forward. The violence has been brutal and it will take time to rebuild confidence, once agreement has been reached on the governing process. The long years of war and the unresolved tensions over disputed territory add to the uncertainty. A cholera outbreak has killed 29 people. ACT Alliance members are providing crucial relief supplies to people who have not been able to plant crops or return home.

Facts on [South Sudan](#)

Internally Displaced People	1.04 million
Refugees	367,260
People in need of aid	4 million

"DSPR Jordan would like to thank each one of you for your continuous support and sympathy to DSPR and the work it is doing. Your generous support helped us and inspired us to do our work with the people in need in the time of crisis. Continuing to support DSPR will help us stand by our brothers and sisters who are in need.

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Acts:20:35) God bless you all," DSPR Jordan

CWS Responds to South Sudan

The Maridi Service Agency is helping displaced people who have come to the relative safety of their town in West Equatoria. They are asking for help to build latrines for over 7,000 displaced people, schooling for the children and psycho social help for women. About 90% are women and children, of which 39 are unaccompanied children. [ACT Alliance](#) members have mounted major relief efforts and [church leaders](#) are active in negotiations.

Resources

Local people in your community may be prepared to share their experiences as a migrant or refugee, or from travels in the Middle East or South Sudan.

CWS has [prepared](#) an accompanying PowerPoint, children's material and an updated appeal leaflet.

Read the latest reports of worsening conditions for Syrian refugees from the UNHCR at: <http://www.unhcr.org/51adb9a02.html>

ACT Alliance (stories and information) <http://www.actalliance.org/>

Relief Web (information on humanitarian situations) : <http://reliefweb.int/home>

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