



## Refugee Sunday Resources 2016

### “I cry aloud to God” Psalm 77:1a

**World Refugee Day** marks the founding of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 20 June, 1950. Refugee Sunday is designated as the following Sunday in the Methodist/Presbyterian Churches, this year 26 June or in the Anglican tradition on 3 July— see the alternative version “Peace to this House” adapted for the Related readings in the lectionary.

*Syrian refugees are our particular focus this year - please include other groups that you may be aware of in your service and prayers. A number of congregations and individuals are assisting refugees settle in Aotearoa New Zealand. Refugee Sunday is a wonderful opportunity for them to share their experiences. Migrants from conflict situations may be willing to share their story or be interviewed. As we join together in prayer and worship, let us remember our obligation to Welcome the Stranger (Matthew 25: 35).*

**The words of the Psalmist capture the tragedy of many, “I cry aloud to God”. Let us pray and act for peace.**

*Photo: Taim (6) crossed the Aegean Sea in a small boat from Turkey. He waits with his parents for a ferry on the island of Chios, Greece. They fled Syria in the hope of reaching safety.*

### **Can you hear the Cry?**

On Refugee Sunday we celebrate the contributions of refugees in our community and remember the men, women and children displaced or forced from their homes by persecution, torture, death, rape and war. Each day 42,500 people who once led ordinary lives, leave their homes in a desperate search for safety. The tragic stories of those lost in the Mediterranean Sea which receive the headlines are a fraction of the total. Under international law, refugees are entitled to protection and assistance—the global community is obligated to meet their basic human rights.

Last year 59.5 million people found shelter in a foreign land or were displaced within their own country. Most face a long wait—the average stay in a refugee camp is 17 years—with few opportunities. The pressure on resources is immense - UN agencies have cut services. ACT Alliance is determined to make sure refugees themselves are central to their efforts to provide relief, shelter, education and other long term support.



## Where you going run to?

When bombs and fighting explode on the doorstep or armed men flood the neighbourhood, people make their choices. Families of young men worry their sons will be forced to take up weapons and those of young women worry they will be raped or worse. Those with money and connections have more options, but it may only be a matter of the mode of transport.

## Why a refugee?

In its report One Humanity: Shared Responsibility prepared for the World Humanitarian Summit, the UN identified conflict and civil war as the primary driver of the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. The reports says conflict and war affect 125 million and account for 80% of the humanitarian demand. Currently an estimated 43% of the world's poor people live in 'fragile' situations—a figure it predicts will increase to 62% by 2030.

## Life as a refugee

Now in the sixth year of war, options for Syrian refugees are closing fast. In Jordan UNHCR reports 85% of the 655,000 registered refugees are living a hand to mouth existence, with 93% falling below the poverty line. More than three quarters of families outside the main refugee camps owed an average of US\$1,038 in January this year. Families are cutting education and meals, and at least one person in 40% of families is working in high risk, illegal, degrading or exploitative temporary jobs.

The story in Lebanon is similar: by the end of March 70% of 1.05 million registered Syrian refugees lived below the poverty line—almost 80% of refugees are women and children. Now 91% of families are in debt, owing on average US\$940. Families are skipping meals and missing out on fruit and vegetables.

### Registered Refugees in Numbers

In Egypt	120 491
In Jordan	655 217
In Lebanon	1 048 275
In Turkey	2 743 497
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 843 344</b>

*Total includes Syrians in Iraq and North Africa.*

#### In Syria

People besieged	592,700
Needing <u>humanitarian assistance</u>	13.5 million
Children out of school	2.7 million
Internally displaced people	6.6 million



*Photo: A brother and sister who have fled their home in Syria wait to be let on to Chios Island in Greece. ACT Alliance/P Jeffrey*

### Children's Talk (PowerPoint available)

**Materials Needed:** PowerPoint of refugee children or video of Solaf's story (<http://www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/solaf-story/>)

**Props:** food, water, blanket, soap, toilet paper, a toy and walking shoes if you wish.

**Introduce:** Has anyone walked a long way? Ask children to talk about walks they have done.

**Explain:** I want you to meet some children (show PowerPoint and read the notes aloud) or Solaf (if using the video) who have travelled a long way. They are all refugees—children who have had to leave their homes and countries because of war.

They used to go to school, play and do things together much like you do. Now they live in crowded shelters. Life is a whole lot tougher. When it rains too much they cannot go outside and sometimes they do not have enough to eat. Many have scary dreams. They may have lost family and friends.

**Ask:** What do you think refugee children might need? Share the props you have brought with you. Jesus said in Matthew 25:35 that we must welcome new people or strangers. You can help refugees in your city (if appropriate) or by sending money to Christian World Service. CWS will send the money to Jordan and Lebanon to pay for food, medical care, schooling, fun days.

**Make:** A wall display with the heading: We welcome refugees. Draw large pictures of the gifts they could give eg food, toys, bedding.

**Pray:** *Loving God, we pray for refugee children. Keep them safe and strong. Bring peace to their hearts and home. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

## Lectionary Readings

### **2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**

Change in leadership can be a difficult time. Elijah sits alongside Moses as one of the masterful leaders of the Israelites. As a prophet, he maintained an important counterbalance to the king and challenged them to follow in God's way. Elisha was a farmer (1 Kings 19:19) who on meeting Elijah determined to follow Elijah. To show his commitment Elisha boiled the oxen he had killed and fed his people before following a less than encouraging Elijah. In this reading Elijah is facing his own death. Elisha asked for and received Elijah's final blessing and mantle. Like Elijah he played a critical role in Israel's history. Advocating for support for refugees at a political level is important for their welfare and safety. Making new leaders aware of their obligations and the need to share the global responsibility is one way to help.

### **Psalms 77:1-2, 11-20**

In the psalmist's prayer for help, we can hear the cry of the refugee just as we can hear our own prayer in difficult times. In reciting this psalm we can find consolation and perhaps strength in remembering how God has helped us in the past. Refugees are extremely vulnerable to the trauma they have experienced and the desperate situation they are in. Helping them keep going is an important life-saving work of psychosocial programmes. In the difficult present, holding on to hope is important especially for those responsible for children and older people.

### **Galatians 5:1, 13-25**

The freedom of Christ is a liberating power. It has its roots in the experience of slavery—something familiar to the Jews through history and the surrounding culture. Freedom is more than an idea—it is transformative. He underlines our absolute responsibility to 'love our neighbour' (v. 14). This new freedom has an agenda of love. In this passage Paul contrasts the negative and the positive. For those who live by the Spirit, the law is unnecessary (v. 23). They will have the following



*Photo: Syrian refugee Ayush pours tea in a tent in northern Lebanon. ACT Alliance/P Jeffrey*

qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (v. 22-23). This text is a real challenge to us all.

### **Luke 9:51-62**

Luke is very clear in introducing the next episode in his story, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (v. 51). For reasons we do not know he chose to make his way via the more hostile territory of Samaria. When he arrived the Samaritans were not welcoming—perhaps they were wary of strangers from Galilee or had heard rumours about his mission. His rebuke to James and John (v. 55) showed his tolerance of their different position. Similarly, his encounters with the would-be disciples (v.57-62) show Jesus' clarity of purpose. If they were not available now, then he did not need them. Jesus was on a mission that required complete commitment. A similar determination can be glimpsed in the faces of refugees seeking safety and a future for their families. They have made up their minds and have decided to risk everything in search of safety. This reading inspires us to greater commitment—our Christian faith compels us to make all the difference in the world.

## Prayer for Refugees

Loving God

There are so many people who are living in constant danger, who have no way of escaping the violence they face: refugees on the road and the sea, families separated from each other, children alone, people forced to flee from their homes, communities under attack.

**May they know your comfort and protection.**

When people are torn from what is familiar and have nowhere to sleep; when they don't know where their next meal will come from and face locked borders or untrustworthy guides; when they are forced to rely on strangers for help.

**May they know your comfort and protection.**

Where there is conflict and turbulence, there are people who are sharing what God has given them with those who need it more. We

remember church people and ACT Alliance giving people the help they need to survive. We remember the people who decide what happens to the refugees. We remember the people who can choose to make peace.

**May they know your comfort and protection.**

Help us remember the times we felt welcomed and included. Help us to take action to support our neighbours in need. In the name of Christ, Amen.

## CWS Responds to Syria

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 essential food, rent subsidies, school costs, hygiene and clothing supplies, and programmes like the children's forums and Mother Support Groups. ACT Alliance members are giving practical help in Syria.



Photo: Zahra takes a pot of soup back to the tent for her family in northern Lebanon. ACT Alliance/P Jeffrey

**Please give generously to the [Syria Appeal](#) to help families survive. CWS is asking parishes to take up a collection or hold an event for Syria on or near Refugee Sunday.**

*"Fleeing one's home is not an easy matter and has never been an option. But life is precious and so we fled. Thank you for helping us until we get back to our homes."*

Sylvia Haddad, DSPR Lebanon

## Take Action

The government has increased the refugee quota from 750 to 1,000. Is it enough? Archbishop Philip Richardson responded. Let your MP and the Minister of Immigration know what you think.

Sign the UNHCR's [#WithRefugees](#) petition to be delivered to the UN in September.

## Resources

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

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

[UNHCR](#) has many resources: [Shakespeare in Za'atari](#); images of sleeping refugee children: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2016/6/5702c1594/where-the-children-sleep.html>

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

*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

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

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