



Refugee Sunday Resources 2016

“Peace to this House” Luke 10:5b

World Refugee Day marks the founding of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 20 June. 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).

Jesus instructed the disciple's to bless 'whatever house they entered. 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 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 refugees in 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.



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.*

Registered Refugees in Numbers

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

Total includes Syrians in Iraq and North Africa.

In Syria	
People besieged	592,700
Needing humanitarian assistance	13.5 million
Children out of school	2.7 million
Internally displaced people	6.6 million

Lectionary Readings

Isaiah 66:10-14

The exiles have returned to Judah. Already v.1 suggests they had begun to rebuild the temple.—completed in 520-515 B.C.E. The return has not gone as well as Second Isaiah had predicted so in the final chapter of Third Isaiah (56-66), the writer spun a new vision. Comparing the resettlement to a women in labour (v. 8), he reminded the exiles that rebuilding takes time and more importantly of God's care for them. The image of God as a nursing mother (v. 12) comforting her child is a powerful and positive depiction of the role of women (v.13). The longing of people in exile for a homeland becomes a strong unifying myth outside the country. For those able to return the destruction and lack of economic opportunity are cruel reminders of what was lost.

Psalms 66:1-9

This psalm of thanksgiving reminds us to be thankful. The powerful symbolism of the parting of the Red Sea evoked in v.6 remembers the time of utmost distress for the Israelites. Whether refugee or someone in search of consolation, the psalm is a healthy reminder of the need to give thanks and to draw strength from the way so many people before us have survived and been shaped by adversity.

Galatians 6: (1-6). 7-16

This text is written in large letters (v. 11). Paul is underlying his message of salvation and liberation—it is a community responsibility (v.2). Living in the Spirit over against the Flesh is an appeal to live well and to 'bear one another's burdens'. While he does not say Jews should not follow cultural practices like circumcision, he says Christians do not have to follow them (v. 12). There are always people telling us what we have to do to fit into the group, but Paul's understanding of the common life is more liberating. In v.17 he concluded the "marks of Jesus were branded on my body" - his faith came from within. He ends the epistle with words of peace.

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus sent out the

seventy. Their task was to be broker's of God's power as Jesus had been—they were to heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom (v.9). They were not to trust in possessions (v.4) which were an encumbrance to finding peace. If they were not welcomed, Jesus instructed them to dust their feet off very publicly (v.11). Jesus will confront the powerful in Jerusalem and is offering this same freedom to the disciples moving from town to town.

Reading this text as the stranger entering a town, it is easy to see the emphasis on hospitality. Like the seventy the refugee travels light and is intent on the task of survival. As Christians obligated by faith to welcome the stranger, offering food and shelter even remotely is an important act of faith and our shared humanity. If we read from this different vantage point, we can see the valuable insights and gifts gained from the interchange.

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 no where 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 neighbour's in need.

In the name of Christ, Amen.

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



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 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.



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.

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/>

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

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

*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."*

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