

Refugee Sunday Resources 2018



“... Open wide your hearts also.” 2 Cor: 6:13b

On Refugee Sunday (23 June, or 1 July in the Anglican tradition see alternative resources), we take time to remember the many people who have been displaced by war, conflict and in fear for their lives. It is a moment to reflect on our responsibilities to people on the move and in need.

Setting out on a journey is a familiar motif in the Christian tradition. There are many stories of migration in the Bible —people fleeing conflict, natural disaster, famine and persecution. Others tell of people seeking opportunities in new places or of being taken as captives or slaves into a foreign land (human trafficking). Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. Noah and his family found safety in the ark they built. Mary and Joseph took the young Jesus into Egypt.

Beside these stories, are those of the people who offer hospitality and *manaakitanga* to strangers, as Abraham and Sarah did by welcoming 3 visitors (Genesis 18) - it was an accepted practice in a region crossed by trade routes. The honour of a person or family was tied up with their capacity to meet their obligations to care for widows, orphans and strangers. This tradition of care and hospitality has continued to be a core part of the Christian faith.

Churches have donated to many CWS appeals that have funded help for millions of people displaced at home or as refugees in neighbouring countries. In Aotearoa New Zealand, thousands of refugees and their families have been assisted to resettle by churches through the work of the former National Council of Churches, later the Refugee and Migrant Service. We acknowledge those offering hospitality to newly settled refugees and advocating on matters of refugee policy with the government.



"Since I came to Jordan, I was in trauma because of the death of my husband, where he was killed in front of my eyes. It forced me to be a regular visitor to the psychiatric clinic for a long period of time," Shireen.

A strong woman, Shireen has found new purpose in her role as group leader with new responsibilities outside her home. She is not sure what the future holds for her homeland. However, her bottom line will always be her own children – she is determined that they will keep up their schooling as she knows this is the best investment for the future.

Best Therapy: Helping Others

For two years, Shireen (*pictured on the right*) has worked as a volunteer with CWS partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, DSPR Jordan, part of the Middle East Council of Churches. The support of the staff and other women in the programme have opened up new possibilities for a woman who a few years ago lived comfortably in Syria.

She welcomes the chance to get out of her tiny apartment and meet with other women, something she would not have done back home. She says for her it is better than the 1,000 pills prescribed by the psychiatric clinic she attended when she first arrived in Irbid, a city close to the border with Syria.

One of the programmes DSPR runs in Jordan is a network of support groups for mothers. Leaders like Shireen are trained to work with their members, collect data and report any pressing needs to DSPR for further help. Shireen passes on what she has learnt to her group – lessons about health, how to improve livelihoods or community issues like gender based violence. In Syria, she had spent her days at home caring for her family, so the biggest challenge has been to find the courage to speak in front of a group.

Shireen's story is not an easy one. In 2015 with her four children she fled Dar'a, where Syria's uprising first began seven years ago.

With Children

Prepare Toasted Chickpeas, Rice Cakes, or Flatbread from the recipes in the [Operation Refugee Kete](#) to share as you talk about who is a refugee and how we can help.

Definitions

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 [or her] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/ [herself] 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](#)



Lectionary Readings

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

The story of David and Goliath is such a familiar story, we need to pay close attention to remember the conflict that is its context. The Valley (or *wadi*) of Elah where it takes place is along an old riverbed, the route from the mountains to the coast. Socoh (v.1) was a small town about 14 miles west of Bethlehem and close to a fortress guarding the main road across the disputed fertile valley.

The story is told twice (beginning again at v.12 plus there is a third version featuring Elhanan in II Samuel 21:19). Each day the soldiers would gather on the battlefield in their effort to claim this prime real estate before returning to their respective camps each night. It is a typical scenario beginning with speeches: Goliath taunts David (v.43,44) then in turn David claims divine favouritism (v. 45). When words fail, they resort to weapons. Using a simple sling shot (remember no rubber), he committed the famous deed, felling Goliath and winning the valuable ground for the Israelites. His decisive victory undermines Saul's position as king.

Forced into exile it is a matter of time before David not only becomes king of Judah but on Saul's death of all the tribes of Israel. As king of Judah, he had acted as a vassal for the Philistines. With more resources, David was able to centralise power and defeat the Philistines (II Samuel 5:17-25, 21:15-22), confining them to the coastal plain.

Philistine families would have been displaced by David's victory just as others would have been rewarded with land and dwellings.

Psalm 9: 9-20

The psalmist gives thanks to God before turning to lament in Psalm 10. Of note is v. 18: "For the needy shall not always be forgotten" - a powerful reminder of our obligations to others. In Psalm 10, the questions regarding God's silence in the face of human suffering are made more strongly. Why do we forget the needy?

II Corinthians 6:1-13

Paul writes to assert his credibility to the Corinthian followers of Jesus. In v.1-2 he tries to get them on side. In v. 4-5 he makes his case, outlining all the suffering he has endured. There is something very familiar about listing one's sufferings as Paul does in order to show worthiness. The reading concludes with an appeal to the heart. As Paul asks his hearers to open their hearts wide to his message (v.



Operation Refugee

Freya (pictured with new friends, a Kurdish family from Syria) did voluntary work with refugees arriving in Greece during the crisis of 2015. She is participating in this year's Operation Refugee from 16-20 June:

"It was heart breaking to see the number of people who have had no choice but to leave their whole lives behind to try and find safety in a country where their lives are not threatened by war. Instead, they find themselves waiting for months, even years, in refugee camps before being granted asylum to be able to begin their lives again. Children don't get to go to school, adults are not able to get jobs, and families are living in tents or derelict buildings with very little food and limited, unhygienic amenities. These people are real, they are good, they are kind, they are generous and they deserve the same chance at life as we have. When visiting the refugee camps their generosity was evident; they have little yet they want to give everything they have to help others. Let's learn from the extravagant love that they show and love them in return, helping them to receive the life of freedom and peace that we all deserve."

13b), let us open our hearts to refugees and displaced people.

Mark 4:35-41

This familiar story of Jesus calming the sea is an interesting one for Refugee Sunday. It might be helpful to imagine the story on a dark night crossing the Mediterranean in a crowded, ill-equipped boat or setting sail as a Rohingya refugee into the Andaman Sea. Imagine the prayers of people desperate for safety and facing an unimaginable future. Who will stop these people from perishing (v.38)? What countries will open their borders to refugees?



Prayer for Refugees

Loving God

We pray for all people uprooted from their homes, for those who need food, water and protection, for those who have lost loved ones and experienced unimaginable harm, for those who struggle to deal with injury, loss and their memories.

May they find strength for each day.

We pray for those who can make a difference, for DSPR giving refugees the support and encouragement they need to take the next steps, for people and organisations that can provide safety and even broker the deals that could bring peace, for all of us that we might not forget the plight of people who have lost so much.

May we find strength to open doors that are closed and change policies that are unjust.

In our world, broken by violence and injustice, we ask for the courage to face up to our responsibilities as citizens of the world and followers of Jesus, the master of hospitality.

May we find the strength to make sure no one is left behind.

Loving God, hear our prayer.

Amen

Refugees By Number (2016)

- 20 people displaced every minute
- 65.6 million were forcibly displaced
- 22.5 million refugees
- 40.3 million internally displaced
- 5.3 million Palestinian refugees
- > 2.5 million smuggled migrants

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Take Action

Operation Refugee is for people who are passionate about helping refugees. You can join the challenge or support someone else.

Donate: CWS, part of ACT Alliance, assists people displaced in large scale humanitarian emergencies, meeting the highest standards. Please support refugees and displaced people:

- Syrian Appeal
- South Sudan Appeal
- Rohingya Appeal
- Gaza Appeal

Help: If you live in Auckland, Dunedin, Invercargill, Manawatu/Whanganui, Nelson, or Wellington, you may be able to provide practical help to a family being resettled. Contact your church or the Red Cross.

Read: about the UN Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration under negotiation.

Write: to the Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Ewan McDonald asking for the release of refugees held on Manus Island and Nauru.

Resources

Ask **local people** in your community to share their experiences as a refugee or migrant.

Watch The Syrian Garden made by ACT Alliance regional partners or a 2017 video featuring refugee students in Lebanon made by our colleagues at Christian Aid.

Read Becoming Human Together, a theological reflection on migration - Christian Aid and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees.

