

# Refugee Sunday 2007: Worship Resources

## “For you are the God in whom I take Refuge”

### Psalm 43:2



#### About Refugee Day

In 2000 the United Nations designated June 20 as World Refugee Day to draw attention to the plight of refugees and acknowledge the contribution that they make to the world. In churches it is celebrated on the following Sunday, this year June 24.

Christian World Service works with partner groups, especially through ACT (Action by Churches Together) International to support and advocate alongside people uprooted by conflict, disaster and political circumstances. This year attention is especially focussed on the situation in Darfur where 2.5 million are homeless, internally displaced and in neighbouring Chad. In early June Middle East and other churches held services marking 40 years since the Six-Day War and calling for an end to the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The situation for Palestinian refugees remains precarious. In 2005 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported that it is responsible for 4.4 million people, many descendents of the original refugees who sought refuge in countries neighbouring Israel some 58 years ago.

Throughout the world there are 20.8 million refugees and people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). CWS continues to appeal for support to meet the desperate need of refugees from Sudan, the Middle East and other countries through ACT International.

In Aotearoa New Zealand CWS has strong historical links with the Refugee and Migrant Service (RMS) who are actively involved in resettling refugees in this country. More information is available on their programme to resettle refugees is available on their website: [www.rms.org.nz/](http://www.rms.org.nz/)

*What is a refugee?... As refugees, we are victims of violence and war. We left our motherland because we were mistreated in many ways. We ran to get protection in other countries. But as a refugee... you are a human being without any value. You can pass through disaster and nobody will care about you. Oh! Without your home you are like a dog without a tail.*  
Andrew Mayak, Sudan

*in In God's Hands: Common Prayer for the World, ed Hugh McCullum and Terry MacArthur*

#### Introduction

Hospitality to strangers is not uniquely Christian. All cultural traditions have ways of welcoming new people who are unknown and outside the group. In most cases this is seen as a virtue, something to be encouraged. Offering hospitality is much more difficult when people speak different languages and cultural practices. In keeping with the lectionary readings these resources focus on the vulnerability of refugees, their dislocation and sense of estrangement. Many who seek refuge are at the mercy of the host governments and communities. They are often traumatised and sometimes physically damaged by what has happened to them. Refugee Sunday is an opportunity to reflect on their plight, pray for their health and safety and respond to those in need.



#### Call to Worship

Loving God

We come as your people  
From the comfort of our homes  
Knowing that we have food and water  
Conscious of the millions of people who have none.

We come as your people

Seeking healing and hope for our broken and violent world  
Amen

#### Children's Talk

You may have someone who is willing to talk to the congregation about what it was like to move countries or towns. Alternatively ask those present, if they have ever felt left out, or what it was like to go to a new school. Use one of the pictures below asking them what they see, draw attention to what is happening in Palestine or Darfur and how difficult it would be for those living in conflict situations. You might like to end by talking about the role people of goodwill have in supporting and accompanying them in difficult times.

## Lectionary Readings

### *Luke 8:26-39*

Reading the text from the perspective of the man with the demons provides parallels with the experience of living in an alien environment. It offers an opportunity to reflect on being estranged and also to think about how we respond to new people with unfamiliar cultural traditions and practices.

The man with demons was considered dangerous by his community. He was ostracized and living among the tombs. In Jesus' time the demons would have been seen as intensely real and reference to the man's strength suggests that the local community could not control him. By naming Jesus the demon suggested that the Gerasene man wanted to control the situation. Jesus stood firm and equal to the challenge named him Legion. Presumably the pigs were owned by non-Israelites probably associated with the occupying Roman legions (note the allusion paralleled in the names of the demons which suggests the local aversion to the occupation by Rome). One interpretation of the people's fearful response to Jesus in verse 35 could be that the people were afraid of how the local Roman force might respond to Jesus and the changed situation personified in the man who had been healed. By asking Jesus to leave in verse 37 the people seem as though they were very fearful for their safety. The man feeling indebted to Jesus wanted to remain with him, but Jesus told him to return to his home community and follow God. However he does not keep quiet about who Jesus is and undoubtedly stirs up more unrest by proclaiming what Jesus had done (verse 39).

### *Psalms 43*

This is a Psalm of exile expressing the yearning of the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and asking for God's help in a time of distress. The writer looks towards God for vindication for all that has happened to the extended family and the time when they can return home to rebuild their lives. His confidence is with God and this faith sustains him.

### *Galatians 3:23-29*

Paul contrasts the ancient understanding of the law with the new vision of radical equality found in Christ Jesus. For centuries Jewish law had shaped family and life in the community. In many ways people learned how to live and behave through this tradition but here Paul is offering a new way for those who have become children of God (verse 26). This new community is not reliant on having been brought up within the Jewish law but rather joined by faith in Christ. It is open to everyone, Gentile and Jew, slave and free, male and female. Such an expansive view of a community where all can be included on an equal footing is a challenge to many of us whose understanding of faith has been formed by our own cultural and denominational traditions. In Christ we can dream of a new humanity.

### *1 Kings 21:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a*

The story of Naboth's vineyard deals with a story of great injustice. Ahab used his royal privilege to demand Naboth's ancestral land for his own use as a vegetable garden. Naboth in verse 3 reminded Ahab that the land belonged to his family for all time and under God's law was inalienable. In response Ahab took to bed and relied on Jezebel to come up with a solution using his royal prerogative. In Ahab's name she wrote letters demanding that Naboth appear before the Assembly where he was found guilty from the testimony of two scoundrels (verse 10, 13). Understandably Naboth responded by cursing God and the king and then was taken out and stoned to death. Ahab, on Jezebel's advice, took the land for his own ends, overstepping the acceptable standards of behaviour. Elijah in verses 17-29 condemns this gross injustice. People's right to their own land is a strong theme in this story.

## A Sudan refugee's voice

Jesus, I want to join my prayers to many other voices. Every few months we are driven away from one refugee camp to the other, so far in the desert where nothing, nothing at all exists.

This is no way for a human being to live. No way to live in such a shocking place – uncultivated, waterless, treeless and barren region...!

Everything is burning, Lord, around me, around us ... in me, in us ... Everything is barren, hell, hell...!

Yet, Lord, we believe you are there, beside us. We pray for all the Africans living now our same condition. Bring back peace and tranquillity to our beloved country.

Peace which is desired by everybody, the old and young, rich and poor, women and men.

Amen ... amen ... Let it be so.

© *Gloria Silvano, Sudan / CAFOD*

## Litany for Refugees

Leader: For the world which God has created, and for peace, that a spirit of respect and tolerance may grow among all people, let us pray:

All: Open our eyes to the beauty of the world.

For an end to violence and oppression and the politics that forces people to live in fear, let us pray:

Open our ears to the cries of those who are in pain.

For those who are persecuted or imprisoned or tortured for their beliefs, let us pray:

Open our eyes to their suffering.

For the refugees of our world, that they may be safe, let us pray:

Open the gates of freedom.

For those who wait in camps and cities for freedom and human dignity, let us pray:

Open our country's door to people who cannot go home.

For us, to speak out on behalf of refugees and displaced people everywhere, let us pray:

Open our mouths to speak for refugees at home and abroad.

For communities and congregations that welcome refugees, introducing them to a new home, let us pray:

Open our doors to the homeless and our hearts to the ministry of refugee resettlement.

CWS Minn-Kota Regional Office with  
Minnesota Refugee Services

***We pray together:***

For all who reach out to God  
That they may find him

For those who think they possess God,  
That they may seek him.

For all who fear the future,  
That they may have confidence .

For all who doubt,  
That they may not despair.

For all who wander aimlessly,  
That they may find a fixed abode.

For the lonely,  
That they may meet another.

For all who are constantly hungry,  
That they may be satisfied.

For those who have enough to eat,  
That they may discover what it is to be hungry.

For those for whom all goes well,  
That they may not become hard hearted

For the powerful,  
That they may be aware that they are vulnerable.

For all who live in this world  
Between hope and fear, And for ourselves, we pray to God

Free us from fear,  
And from a false sense of security,  
And give us all those things that are for our good,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(from Alternative Ecumenical Service prepared by Middle East churches: <http://www.sabeel.org/etemplate.php>)

**Prayer**

When lives are lost and families split,  
Lord, comfort those who mourn.  
Where homes are crushed and dreams destroyed,  
Give shelter to the vulnerable.  
When people flee and hope departs,  
Bring calm amid the fear.  
Where panic rules and courage fails,  
Restore strength to all who carry on.  
And when the people cry out,  
Lord, open our ears to hear,  
Our minds to comprehend,  
And our hearts to respond,  
With all compassion.

*in In God's Hands: Common Prayer for the World, ed Hugh McCullum and Terry MacArthur*

Help us O God, achieve  
the peace that cares for the wellbeing of the people;  
the peace that rebukes injustice and violence;  
the peace that seeks freedom for all;  
the peace that heals the hurts of the past;  
the peace that enables for today  
and releases the potential for tomorrow;  
the peace that is new life in Christ. Amen.  
(from Alternative Ecumenical Service prepared by Middle East churches: <http://www.sabeel.org/etemplate.php>)

**Blessing of light – Traditional Irish blessing**

May the blessing of light be on you,  
Light without and light within.  
May the blessed sunlight shine upon you and warm your heart  
Till it glows like a great fire,  
And strangers may warm themselves as well as friends.  
And may the light shine out of the eyes of you  
Like a candle set in the window of a house,  
Bidding the wanderer to come in out of the storm.  
May you ever have a kindly greeting for people  
As you're going along the roads.  
And now may the Lord bless you,  
And bless you kindly.  
Amen.



Hawa (left) with her two companions returning to their camp from collecting firewood.

Charlotte Brudenell, ACT-Caritas

**The shadow of a mountain: Both refuge and darkness for people displaced by conflict**

**By Charlotte Brudenell, ACT-Caritas field communicator**

**Nertiti, Jebel Marra, January 9, 2007**—As the sun rises from behind the mountain, boys in long, white shirts, known as “jelabia,” hurry through the streets of Nertiti, kicking up the dust with their feet.

The healthy chatter of their youthful voices fills the quiet of a town where the common mode of transportation is either donkey or foot. (The only motorized vehicles that venture off the main tarmac road are those of humanitarian agencies, government authorities or armed forces).

The boys are hurrying to get to school on time. In the yard, those who arrive late for morning assembly try to strategically dodge past the teacher standing at the gate.

“I want to learn so that I can help develop my country and help my mother and my community by getting a job,” says 15-year-old Abaker, a student at the school.

Abaker, like all the boys who attend “Northern Camp” school, lives in a camp for internally displaced people (IDP). He is one of more than 30,000 people living in two camps in Nertiti.

The school’s headmaster explains: “After the conflict broke out in 2003, and their villages were burnt by armed militias, people flocked to Nertiti in the hope that the town would provide them with safety and protection.”

The school was set up three years ago by ACT-Caritas partner Sudan Social Development Organization (SUDO), as existing government run schools could not cope with the steep rise in student numbers due to the influx of IDPs. The cost of sending their children to private schools could never be met by the displaced families who have lost both their homes and livelihoods.

“Northern camp” school provides education at a third of the cost of government schools and also provides free materials to the students and teachers. Originally it accommodated both boys and girls, but due to the number of students, another school for girls was created with the support of an international non-governmental organization. “If this school wasn’t here, and these children could not learn, then they would purely be victims of the conflict,” says the headmaster.

In Nertiti, SUDO also runs a community center and a health care clinic, which provides free services and medication. At the community center, adult education classes provide men and women with the opportunity to learn a range of skills from basic literacy to Islam and English.

Small-scale income-generating activities are also carried out at the center, and a group of men have been trained to make shoes. Ousman, one of the shoemakers, says, "This center is good for us. We are now able to work and get a small amount of money from what we sell."

"We were all farmers," says his colleague, Yusef, "but in three years I have not gone outside the town." As he explains, "It is not safe. We cannot go outside due to the spread of weapons." There is the sound of gunfire. No need to say more. But he does. "Everyday we hear gunshots."

Nertiti is located in the southwest foothills of Jebel Marra mountain, a stronghold of one of the largest factions of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and perhaps the most strategic location in the whole of Darfur. Geographically difficult to access, it is also the most fertile area in Darfur.

With rebel groups just 2 to 3 kilometers up the mountainside, there is a large military base below the town, a strong police presence, as well as a base of the African Union (AU). The AU does not patrol around the camps, but soldiers from the government of Sudan army do. And yet, "at sunset we never feel comfortable," says Hawa, a woman at SUDO's community center. "We don't leave our homes after sunset, not even to visit a neighbor. If we go outside, we can be beaten and robbed. This is normal."

In the shadow of Jebel Marra mountain, the IDPs report that because they are all originally from areas under the control of the SLA, they are treated as if they too are rebels.

"They say the Fur tribe is finished," reports one woman.

"Only the NGOs here make us feel safe. We trust the NGOs; they provide all the services, food, water, health care, household items. They have given us everything," says another woman.

However, due to the presence of armed militias to the east, the United Nations has declared the road from Nertiti to Zalingei a "no-go" route. A military escort is recommended for travel along the road. With SUDO's nearest office in Zalingei, the lack of security could reduce the delivery of humanitarian assistance and services at any time.

"Without the NGOs, without SUDO's center here, we would do nothing. We would just suffer," states Hawa.



A boy and a man in the Beach Road Refugee camp.

Credit: Paul Jeffrey/Action by Churches Together



A Palestinian girl walks by the remains of a house in Bethlehem that was destroyed the day before by Israeli soldiers while searching for a man they claimed was a Palestinian militant. The troops destroyed the building, which contained the residences of four families, and damaged neighbouring apartments, before killing the man.

Paul Jeffrey/Action by Churches Together

#### Further resources:

The United Nations Refugee Agency - UNHCR (for pictures, statistics and stories)

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

Ecumenical Service for Middle East Churches on the 40 year anniversary

<http://www.sabeel.org/etemplate.php?id=59>

Refugee and Migrant Service

<http://www.rms.org.nz/>

Refugee and Migrant Service Worship Kit

<http://www.rms.org.nz/document/World%20Refugee%20Week%20Resource%20Pack%20Churches%202007.pdf>

ACT International (stories and information on emergency situations)

[http://www.act-intl.org/act\\_main\\_title.html](http://www.act-intl.org/act_main_title.html)

CWS Darfur Appeal

Backgrounder: <http://www.cws.org.nz/Files/Darfur-backgrou.pdf>

Appeal flyer: <http://www.cws.org.nz/Files/Darfur-flyer-07.pdf>

Palestine

Christian Aid checklist on viable solution for the Middle East (new report)

<http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/news/media/pressrel/070604p.htm>