

# Refugee Sunday 2008: Worship Resources

## “So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:31



### World Refugee Day

World Refugee Day is celebrated each year on June 20. These resources have been prepared using the lectionary readings for Sunday, June 22, 2008 and can be adapted to suit your priorities. The focus this year is on protecting refugees and the rights of refugees. Some need economic security while others need protection from violence and persecution. All refugees need the guarantee of adequate food, water and shelter as well legal protection. In Aotearoa New Zealand CWS has strong historical links with Refugee Services formerly known as the Refugee and Migrant Service (RMS) who are actively involved in resettling 750 refugees (the official quota) a year in this country.

### Who is a refugee?

“A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in 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

### Refugee Facts

There are 13.9 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide.

There are 8.8 million refugees who have spent more than 5 years in camps or warehouses.

There are 4.6 million Palestinian refugees.

Sources: World Refugee Survey 2007, UNWRA

### Introduction

Migration continues to pose a major challenge for the world especially as increasing numbers of people are forced to flee their homes for reasons that are often very complex. According to the UNHCR, the United Nations agency responsible for refugees, some 40 million people have been pushed from their homes because of violence and persecution. Underlying factors like dramatic changes in the physical environment (for example rapidly expanding desert areas in the Sahel and Sahara of Africa), rising water levels in coastal regions, shortages of food and other essential resources, injustices and the failure of governments also cause people to be uprooted from their homes and livelihoods. Having groups, churches, organisations and governments who work for refugee protection can be the difference between life and death.

Christian World Service works with a number of programmes, for example the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East and the work of ACT-Caritas with displaced people in Darfur and Zimbabwe.

### The Responsibility to Protect

Refugees do not leave their home by choice. Many have faced atrocities and indignities that we would find hard to imagine. Some of these could have been avoided if the international community had chosen to act for example to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 or the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in 1995. There has been increasing debate in international circles about the need to safeguard human life. In 2005 and 6 all members of the UN Summit adopted an unprecedented new international doctrine: the ‘responsibility to protect’ civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity when a state is unwilling to do so, often shortened to R2P.

Discussions have also been held at the World Council of Churches where in 2006 members affirmed “an ecumenical responsibility [to protect vulnerable people], conceiving the world as one household of God, who is the creator of all.” Under R2P the first responsibility is to **prevent** atrocities, to **react** to what is being done and then to **rebuild** communities, livelihoods and good government afterwards. As church people we can speak out, reminding the government of its international responsibilities when so many people’s lives are under threat in places like Zimbabwe and Darfur.

## Lectionary Readings

*Matthew 10:24-39 (suggested begin with v.26)*

On two occasions this text instructs us not to be afraid (v 26 and 31). It is a text that exhorts the reader to have courage. In v 37-8 Matthew clearly lays out what it means to become part of the new inclusive Christian community. It meant a complete break with family and the existing village structure and a refocusing on Jesus. In many ways this has parallels for refugees resettling in Aotearoa who have to rebuild social networks in a new land. As part of the Christian community it is therefore crucial that we are open to people who are of different cultural traditions, respecting them as people of dignity and worth.

*Psalms 86: 1-10, 16-17*

This is a prayer for help that could easily be that of a person seeking refuge from violence and despair.

*Romans 6:1b-11*

Paul contrasts the past and the present, the old and the new, death and life. Baptism is the rite that marks this transformation. By baptism we become new (v.3-4) and as a consequence faith in God invites new behaviour.

Transformed by the love of God we are to be dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus (v.11). This transformation suggests a heightened awareness of God's love not just for ourselves but for the whole of God's creation.

*Genesis 21:8-21*

In reading this passage it is important to remember how vulnerable human life at the time of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar was. Survival of children into adulthood was certainly not guaranteed and once Sarah realises that Ishmael will survive she apparently decides that Isaac's hereditary rights may be under threat so pressures Abraham to send him away with his mother. Abraham is not a very generous father. He only gives Hagar and Ishmael (who is not named in this portion of the text) bread and water (v. 14). Not very generous alimony from a man who has slaves, livestock (Gen 12:16), silver and gold (13:2)! Running out of water, Hagar cannot bear to see her son die so sits down away from him (v. 16) and weeps. Note that in the text she does not call out to God rather God responds to her plight. God opens her eyes to find a well of water (v. 19). This is not all. Under God's protection he grows up to a future that parallels Isaac's but in the wilderness of Paran.

## Children's Talk

*If possible find a recent picture in your local paper of a conflict situation. Bring lots of things to make noise with so there is one for each person - though car keys will also work very well.*

Invite the children to think about times when they have been afraid - you may like to share a story from your own childhood to facilitate discussion. Show your picture or otherwise talk about a war situation with which you are somewhat familiar and how frightening it must be for children living there. Conclude by telling the children that God tells us to not be afraid. You may like to ask someone to read Matthew 10:31. Then tell them that one of the ways that helps people not be afraid is to make lots of noise. Invite them to join you in making noise in a loud prayer that asks God to protect all those people who are living in conflict zones and saying as a church we will help!

## Prayer for Ourselves

Loving God

Who knows no borders.

Open our ears to those people whose cries have been made silent by the noise of our own lives and a world too intent on making money to care.

Open our eyes to those people who live silently as our neighbours, afraid to speak out even though they cannot find jobs or meaningful community.

Open our hearts to those people who live their lives differently, who eat unfamiliar foods, who speak in many languages and who by their very presence expand our view of the world that you created.

Amen

## Prayer for Uprooted People

Loving God

Who cares and protects us all

We pray for those people who have experienced some of earth's darkest moments:

Who have starved for want of food

Who have slept outside for want of shelter

Who have been beaten for want of protection.

**We pray for your people, O Lord our strength in times of trouble.**

We pray for those people who have become violent  
Who are filled with hatred for those who are different from themselves

Who are blinded by greed for possessions and power

Who are driven by forces that hurt and harm.

**We pray for your people, O Lord our strength in times of trouble.**

We pray for those people and governments who have the power to protect, that they might find the courage to speak out and to act to end the violence that compels people to flee in terror for their lives.

**We pray for your people, O Lord our strength in times of trouble.**

For we live in your world

A world with room for us all

A world where peace is possible

And where there is enough for everybody to eat.

Amen

## Suggested Hymns

Tell My People I Love them AA132

Loving Spirit AA94 (ii)

May the Mystery of God enfold us AA95

Safe in the Hands of God AA117

Now Thank We All our God WOV14

Sing Praise and Thanksgiving WOV25

God is the Refuge of His Saints WOV45

O God our Help in Ages Past WOV46

Eternal Father, strong to Save WOV74

Where the Road Runs Out WOV672

Ma te marie a te Atua WOV679

***If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk with others.***

**African Proverb**

## South African Churches Act to Protect

*The Churches of South Africa have been providing shelter for thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. Earlier this year there were a series of attacks on the refugees. The South Africa Churches spoke out:*

"The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has expressed deep shock and sadness over the recent spate of violence directed against foreign nationals living in Alexandra, whilst warning that such attacks should not be seen as simple manifestations of xenophobia. "We urge residents of these communities to desist from violence," said the Council's General Secretary, Mr. Eddie Makue, "and we commit ourselves to working with public servants and all those living in the affected areas to promote human security and sustainable livelihoods for locals and immigrants alike."

"As people of faith, we strongly condemn the use of violence and intimidation, particularly insofar as it is targeted against strangers and uprooted people," Makue continued. "Christian scriptures, in common with those of the other great faiths, contain numerous passages asserting believers' responsibility to show hospitality to strangers and to protect society's most vulnerable members, including aliens."

"This notion is also central to African concepts of our shared humanity and responsibility to each other as people, in particular the principle of *ubuntu*," he said. "As South Africans, we recognise that throughout the apartheid era many of our neighbours – who often had less in material terms than we did – welcomed those who had been uprooted by the political turmoil in our own land and shared with us what they had. By the grace of God, we are now in a position to do the same for those who have been displaced by contemporary social, political and economic upheavals."

Rev. Gift Moerane, Ecumenical Secretary of the SACC Gauteng, emphasised that the Council acknowledged the pain experienced by households that are struggling to make ends meet, particularly in the context of rapidly rising prices. "Often they feel that they alone are expected to bear the additional burden of accommodating people – both South Africans and foreign nationals – who have been displaced by larger forces over which they have no control," Rev. Moerane said.

"We stand with such communities in demanding justice, dignity, a fairer distribution of the wealth and resources that God has entrusted to our care, and a compassionate and caring society. At the same time, we urge South Africans not to fall into the easy trap of making foreign nationals or any other equally vulnerable group scapegoats for the difficult and complex problems that they are compelled to face," he added.

"These include the frustration of popular expectations of profound social transformation and the global and regional factors that have suppressed broad-based development. Such forces have instead concentrated political and economic power in the hands of a tiny elite, unaccountable to democratic structures, whilst robbing the poor of the means to meet their most basic needs," Bartlett observed.

In addition, recent reports suggest that unscrupulous individuals in Alexandra and other communities are exploiting the conflict as a cloak to obscure their own opportunistic or criminal agendas.

The General Secretary said that the Council's 27 member denominations are committed to working with all those affected by these tragic events to address the underlying factors that have given rise to rootlessness, frustration and an undermining of respect for each other's inherent human dignity. "We believe that South Africa can and should do more to promote security, political stability and broad-based economic development in the region, as well as to ensure a more equitable sharing of resources and delivery of services in our own nation," Makue said.

On May 14 a delegation of church leaders from the SACC Gauteng paid a pastoral visit to Alexandra and met with police and community officials. A crisis committee of local church leaders was established that will liaise with Council structures on an ongoing basis. The leaders pledged to continue working with members of the community who are seeking to build peace, security and justice for all South African residents, regardless of their national origins.



### Resources

The Churches Agency on International Issues has produced a new edition of Hot Topics, *Immigration Matters*. It includes discussion material for groups as well as information, stories and theological reflection. It can be downloaded at: <http://www.cws.org.nz/resources/international.asp> or requested from CWS at PO Box 22 652, Christchurch 8142.

The United Nations Refugee Agency - UNHCR (for pictures, statistics and stories) <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

Refugee Services (formerly the Refugee and Migrant Service) <http://www.refugeeservices.org.nz/>

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)

# Marabastad: Gate to Sanctuary or Ticket to Hell?

Rev Martin Maluleke

I was hungry, you did not feed me! I was naked, you did not clothe me!

The situation of about 300 people who are living on the pavement and their only belongings hanging from the palisade fencing around the department of Home Affairs in D.F Malan drive offices in Tshwane Pretoria known to be refugees or asylum seekers is heartbreaking and very painful when you are looking at it from the Christian and human point of view, particularly when you are confronted by it on a daily bases.



They fled their places of birth in the troubled regions of Africa, hoping to find refuge and a home away from home in South Africa. They come from these parts of the continent Uganda, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Burundi. The question that politicians are debating is, "What or who is a refugee?" A refugee according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is a person(s) who is not a citizen of the Republic of South Africa or the national which they find themselves in, who has fled his/her home country because of a well founded fear of being persecuted, reasons for persecution could be race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, they might also be unable to live in their home country because of foreign-aggression (i.e. war) or disruption of social order.

The challenge for the Church of Jesus Christ

The text in Matthew 25:31-46 has challenged us at the Sunnyside Society to move from our comfort zone to the Marabastad Home Affairs offices and pledge our solidarity with the refugees. This concern has since given birth to the project named: I was hungry project (IWHP), which has as its aims to provide food, shelter and clothing for the poorest of the poor in our back yard. The challenge for the Church in the inner city is to be pro-active and be the vehicle for healing and transformation. This passage of Matthew 25: 31-46, which in my New International Version, is quoted as words narrated by Jesus when he addressed the two groups of audiences the doers and the lookers.

These refugees are created in the image of God and I hold a view that Christ living in me forced me to be ashamed when other people are living in such condition and I continue to move on with my business as usual.

This passage addresses the delivery of food, clothing, water, and fellowship. In my view these are basic needs for each and every human being - if we are a Church that is concerned with human dignity (another aspect which Jesus raises).

Finally the challenge of feeding, clothing and fellowshiping is given to the doers. It also challenged me in the engagement of Jesus Christ, as with the doers. Eugene H. Peterson puts it in these wonderful words "I'm telling you the solemn truth: whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me! You failed to do it to me." (Matthew 25:45).

<http://www.methodist.org.za/articleFull.php?id=350>