



## “My Tears have been my Food Day and Night” Ps 42:3a World Refugee Sunday Resources 2013

*World Refugee Day* marks the founding of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 20 June. CWS invites you to remember the plight of the refugee on the closest Sunday, this year 23 June. In the Anglican tradition Refugee Sunday is 7 July. These resources can be adapted for your congregation or used for private reflection.

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

**“A humanitarian, political and social disaster is already upon us, and what looms is truly a nightmare. Civilians bear the brunt of this crisis in which human rights violations have reached horrific dimensions. Confronted with the flagrant disregard of international law and human life on every side, I feel utter dismay.”**

*Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 27 May 2013.*

CWS is asking churches to join in prayer and action for Syria. The people are surviving amidst escalating conflict and little prospect of peace. Civilians are in need of help. More than 80,000 people have been killed and 1.5 million forced to flee into neighbouring countries. Within Syria, in April UNHCR reported 6.8 million people in need and the situation has worsened. The civil war is crossing borders and causing immense human tragedy. CWS partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are struggling to help the new refugees. They have asked for more financial help and our prayers.

## A Very Short Background

The current conflict has its roots in the uprising of March 2011, though the story can be linked with earlier uprisings in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and with increasing poverty. Teenagers were arrested and tortured for writing graffiti on a school wall in Deraa in the south. Security forces fired on demonstrators and the protest escalated. In response growing numbers took to the streets calling for the resignation of President A Bashar al-Assad. The numbers continued to swell as hundreds of thousands joined the protests. Security forces loyal to the president responded brutally. Largely peaceful protests turned into armed rebellion with support from outside players. In the second half of 2012 the civil war spread to the major cities of Aleppo and Damascus.

Opposition within Syria is fragmented on ethnic and religious lines, reflecting different interests but also a consequence of the conflict. It includes defectors from the army who formed the Syrian Free Army. The UN has failed to stop the escalating tensions, and armaments are being shipped to both sides as the country becomes a focal point for global tension. Large waves of Syrians, Kurds, Turks and also Palestinian refugees formerly resident in Syria have fled. Within Syria fighting continues on many fronts. Recent reports talk of a health system on the brink of collapse. Many of the sick and wounded do not have medical care. Human rights violations are widespread and there is evidence that cluster munitions and chemical weapons have been used.

The region is in serious trouble. The influx of refugees and attacks in and from Lebanon and Israel have increased the level of insecurity. There are calls for military intervention from outside but no evidence that this would reduce the harm to civilian populations or end the conflict. The war that grew from people marching for political and social transformation has also become a major focus for global players. If anything this has served to escalate the crisis and increased the availability of weapons causing ever more destruction.

The neighbouring countries of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are struggling to cope with a massive influx of refugees. Refugee camps run by UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees) are overflowing with Palestinian refugees who had once found shelter in Syria. There are none for the Syrian refugees - 76% of all refugees live in urban areas outside the camps. Lebanon's population has grown by more than 10% since the outbreak of fighting, rents have risen sharply, overcrowding is common, and the government is struggling to provide education and other basic services. Syrians remain anxious for relatives and for a country whose people were economically self-sufficient and lived in peace.

Urgent action is needed to de-escalate the conflict, stop the influx of weapons, respect human rights, meet humanitarian needs and find a way for Syrians to find their own way forward.



*“...In this painful situation, we can but call the whole world to try putting an end to the Syrian crisis so that Syria becomes again a garden of love, security and coexistence. Settling accounts should not happen at the expense of the human beings who live here. We also call all the churches in the whole world to stand fast in the face of what is going on and witness to their faith in the power of love in this world. It is necessary to take steps that reflect their refusal to all kinds of violence hitting the human beings living in the East.”*

**Patriarch John X Yazigi and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I was**

In an official joint statement released by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. (<http://www.antiochian.org/joint-communicue-abduction-bishop-paul-and-bishop-john>)

### Facts on Syria

Population	21.4 million
People in Need	6.8 million
Internally Displaced	4.25 million
Children in need	3.1 million
Refugees in neighbour countries	1,528,924
Palestinian refugees in need	420,000

## Lectinary Readings

### 1 Kings 19: 1-4 (5-7) 8-15a

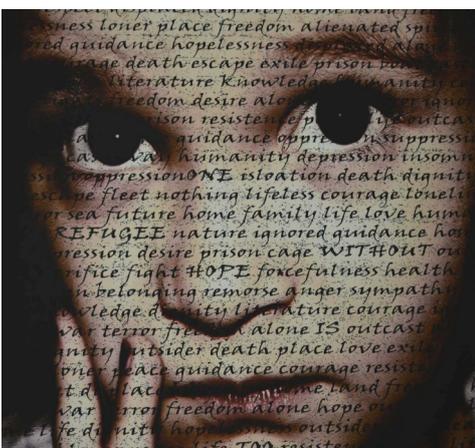
Elijah fled for his life after the dramatic showdown, culminating when he killed the prophets of Jezebel. Angry at his total victory, Jezebel wanted him dead. Leaving his servant in Beer-sheba (part of Judah), Elijah went into the Sinai wilderness towards Mount Horeb. Facing danger from every direction, Elijah decided to give up in despair asking God to 'take away my life' (v 4). However, it was not so easy. Instead an angel touched him twice telling him to 'Get up and eat' (v 5, 7). He obeyed, eating enough to last the 40 days and nights he was in the wilderness.

Even after all that had happened, Elijah did not lose the sense of who he was and for whom he worked. He sheltered in the cave (v 9) perhaps the same one as Moses, and the word of God came to him (v 9b). The sounds of God passing by provide a memorable atmosphere to the story in which Elijah confronted his destiny (v 14). God had plans for Elijah: to anoint Hazael king of neighbouring Aram (Syria), Jehu as the new king of Israel (v 16) and Elisha as his successor (v 16), forging a strong alliance between the three. Once a refugee facing imminent death, Elijah had work to do.

### Psalms 42 and 43

These two psalms form one lament, expressing a sense of abandonment but confidence in 'the God of my life' (42:8c). The thirst for communion with God is not about the psalmist's personal relationship with Yahweh so much it is a longing to be part of a believing community (42:4). Far from the Temple and somewhere in the foothills of Mount Hermon, the psalmist expresses a cry of anguish in the face of his enemies (v 6ff). Mt Hermon is on the border of Lebanon and Syria and extends to the Golan Heights. At 2,814 metres it is the highest point in Syria.

### Galatians 3:23-29



**1 Family torn apart by war is too many.**

In 1 Minute a family can lose everything.  
In 1 Minute you can help.

Learn. Share. Donate.  
[www.unhcr.org.au](http://www.unhcr.org.au)



World Refugee Day: June 20



Paul once again considers the role of the Jewish law in preparing a person to know Christ. Once we have discovered the new faith in Christ, we are no longer dependent on the law for guidance but rather on grace (v25-6). Baptism into the emerging Christian community signified a

change in allegiance (v 27). The old social distinctions have no meaning and all have a place in this "grown up" faith community. It is the love of God for the whole world that breaks down the divisions and compels us towards a radical love of neighbour. At a time when war creates enemies, Christians are called to practical action, helping those in need.

### Luke 8:26-39

Like a refugee or an internally displaced person (IDP), the man with demons had no home. He lived among the tombs and was considered too dangerous to be approached. The demons would have been his only companions.

The region of Gerasenes in northern Palestine was home to ten military outposts and a centre of Roman control. Jesus named the demons as 'legion', presumably alluding to the many occupying troops in their midst. Legion refers to a unit of 3000 - 6000 men in the Roman military.

No wonder that the locals were afraid when they saw the healed man sitting quietly at Jesus' feet (v 35). His power to free the legions from the man signal something very powerful and potentially dangerous. Frightened or at least nervous the locals asked Jesus to leave (v 37). The healed man wanted to follow his healer, but Jesus sent him home to 'declare how much God has done for you' (v 39). The man returns to reconnect with his community.

### Prayer for Syria

Loving God,  
We pray for Syria—a land where peace is a distant memory and hope is a desperate dream. Where once there was food for all, now families struggle to survive. Where mothers and children laughed and cried, families now live in constant fear of attack and the violence is without end.

We pray for the people of Syria

**Where hatred and bitterness fuel the fighting, we pray for peace.**

We pray for the Syrian and Palestinian refugees, crammed into temporary shelter and dependent on others for help. We pray for parents trying to send their children to school and those in need of medical care. We remember all those providing the services that they need—may there be enough food and medicine for all.

We pray for the people of Syria

**Where hatred and bitterness fuel the fighting, we pray for peace.**

We pray for a breakthrough in United Nations negotiations that will uphold the rights of all people and deal with the causes of the conflict.

We pray for the people of Syria

**Where hatred and bitterness fuel the fighting, we pray for peace.**

**In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen**



Photo credits: ACT/ Paul Jeffrey

### Children's Talk

You may like to put up a small tent and as you go so have a discussion: Have you slept in a tent? For how long? Some children are living in tents full time –winter and summer. They have no where else.

In a faraway country called Syria there is terrible fighting. Guns, bombs and explosions. They can't go to the shops to buy food or the doctor if they need help. It is very scary. Many people have already fled. They have taken their families into other countries and now they live in tents. One of these camps is called Al-Zaatari in the north of Jordan. It is the second biggest refugee camp in the world. But it is no holiday. There are 160,000 people living there—18,000 more than in Hamilton.

Some of the children have been living there for almost a year. I don't know the names of these children (show the [slide](http://www.cws.org.nz/files/Syriachildren.pptx) <http://www.cws.org.nz/files/Syriachildren.pptx> or a printed picture). How old do you think they are? Their home has been a tent for nearly a year. The camp is more crowded now, the tent is more ragged and their mother's money has run out. They cannot go back home so who will help? We can help. Welcoming refugees and helping people in need is what Christians do. In faraway places, we give money to Christian World Service who work with local people to do the helping. We can also pray for Syria's children.

*Loving God, We pray for children and their families from Syria. May they find the help they need. May the fighting stop and peace begin. Amen.*

**Please give generously to the Syria Appeal to help families survive. Consider organising a fundraising concert or stall so that more people are sheltered and fed. Please continue to pray for an end to the nightmare that is destabilising the Middle East.**

### Christian Presence in the Middle East

On April 22 two Syrian Orthodox Archbishops were kidnapped near Aleppo, Syria. They are known for working for peace for all Syrians. In May church leaders gathered to discuss the situation in the Middle East, amidst the intensifying conflict and the high death toll. They called for prayer and action. It can be read at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/conference-issues-statement-on-christian-presence-in-the-middle-east>

### CWS Responds to Syria Need

CWS has an appeal open for Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Funds are sought to help long term partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) respond to the needs of growing numbers of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. They are almost overwhelmed by the need and have been rapidly expanding their services to the new refugee communities. Funds raised in this appeal will help provide rent subsidies for the many living outside the camps, school costs, essential food, hygiene and clothing supplies, and kindergarten programmes.

In addition sister agency and ACT Alliance member the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is active within Syria, in Jordan and Lebanon, responding to the desperate humanitarian need through churches and Islamic groups. As they are able, they are providing food and other basic supplies, rental and school subsidies and some medical care.

### Resources

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

CWS has prepared an accompanying [PowerPoint](http://www.cws.org.nz/files/Syriachildren.pptx) (<http://www.cws.org.nz/files/Syriachildren.pptx>) and an updated appeal leaflet.

Read the latest reports of worsening conditions for Syrian refugees from the UNHCR at: <http://www.unhcr.org/51adb9a02.html>

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

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



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