



UNHCR/Francesco Malavolta

“For whenever I am weak, then I am strong”

World Refugee Sunday Resources 2015

World Refugee Day marks the founding of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 20 June. Refugee Sunday is celebrated on 5 July in the Anglican tradition. An alternative version is based on readings for June 21. Read John Bluck’s reflection. These resources can be adapted for your congregation or 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

Where are you in the refugee story?

In April the Italian navy rescued 70 asylum seekers and migrants from a half-inflated dinghy. They were attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Europe. Some had burns caused by an exploding canister before they departed but were not allowed to seek medical treatment. The most severely injured were airlifted to a hospital in Sicily on arrival. Most were removed to the Lampedusa Detention Centre (pictured). It was a week where around 13,500 people had braved the ocean in search of refuge. They are not the only ones.

The Prime Minister warns that asylum seekers may try to reach New Zealand’s shores. The Australian government is funding detention centres in countries like Nauru and Cambodia. New Zealand is a country of migrant peoples. As Christians we have a moral and biblical obligation to “Welcome the Stranger”. Please join CWS in prayer and action for refugees and displaced people.



"All around the world we are seeing families fleeing violence. The numbers are massive – but we must not forget that these are mothers and fathers, daughters and sons. People who led ordinary lives before war forced them to flee. On this World Refugee Day, everyone should remember the things that connect all of us – our common humanity."

António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

How many Refugees?

In coming weeks the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will report on the number of refugees and people of concern for them in 2014. In 2013 there were 51.2 million people, the highest number since World War II. In Syria, 6.5 million people are displaced within the country and in Iraq 5.6 million people have fled. Whether from South Sudan or Burundi, they can only be refugees if a country lets them cross the border.



Photo: ACT/Naccache

Who are the Refugees?

Fatimeh weeps as she tells her story. A Syrian-Palestinian refugee she shares a small home with two other families in Lebanon. Each day is a struggle she meets with the determination that has kept her going since the family fled their home. Once Palestinian refugees living in Syria were seen as better off than those who had found refuge in other places, but no more. In Syria many more jobs were open to them than in neighbouring countries. Now only those who cannot leave remain as the four year conflict intensifies.

Choosing to leave home for an unknown future is not an easy decision. Fatimeh says, "My parents used to tell us how difficult it was to leave Palestine. When we left Syria, I could finally understand what they went through. I feel humiliated asking for help, and the way I am being spoken to. We have no money for medicine if the children get sick, we just have to pray to God they won't get sick." Fatimeh is one of 1,183,327 Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



Refugee students take a break from learning English at Sabra in Lebanon. Photo: DSPR Lebanon

Children's Talk

(PowerPoint available)

Think about the age of the children you are working with before deciding what to do. We do not want to frighten or embarrass children who have had different life experiences.

Far from Home

Invite children to sing a song or share something from different cultural traditions. Alternatively interview a good storyteller from another country about their life: What was life like where you came from? What games did you play? What different foods did you eat? Schoolwork?

For older children use the PowerPoint or worksheet to talk about challenges of being a refugee in Lebanon.

You could invite them to draw a picture of their home and their possessions. Ask them to show you what is the one thing (eg favourite toy, item of clothing, book) that is most important to them. Ask them if this is what they would take if they had to leave home quickly. Explain what a refugee is and what they might need to survive in a new country.

In God's world, everybody has a place. Sometimes things happen and people have to leave their homes and country. When there are wars or disasters, we can give money to Christian World Service to help refugees from places like Syria and Iraq. You might like to make a coin trail from here to the Middle East on a map or in the shape of a house.

Let us pray for them:

Loving God, We pray for refugee children and their families. Keep them safe. Make sure they have enough food and a warm place to sleep. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Lectionary Readings

II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Exiled in the land of the Philistines by Saul, David worked out how to regain his place in his native tribe of Judah. He earned support from landowners by protecting them from robbers and sharing his battle spoils with them (I Samuel 23:1-5, 25:2ff, 27:8-12, 30:26-31). On Saul's death, David used his successful record as a military commander, strategic marriages and shrewd political skills to take over as king of Judah.

For the first seven years he ruled Judah as a vassal of the Philistines (there is no evidence of conflict between the two) but his eye was on the northern kingdom, now ruled by Saul's weak son Ishbaal. A bitter civil war broke out between David and Ishbaal's armies. Abner, the military commander who had supported Ishbaal, changed his allegiance to David but was killed by Joab. David had entered into strategic marriages notably Saul's daughter Michal (who was already happily married (3:12-16)). Finally at Hebron, David brokered the deal that enabled him to rule the Northern Kingdom and Judah.

He went on to conquer the Jebusites, the indigenous people of Jerusalem (v.6-8). Seven years into his rule, he built his capital city around the fortified hilltop of Zion. More powerful he was a threat to his former Philistine allies. David's armies defeated them (II Samuel 5:17-25, 21:15-22) and confined them to the coastal plain.

The storyteller focuses our attention on David's rising power rather than the wider context. As the seventh or eighth son, he would have had little property to inherit, yet he became king of a united Israel. There is murder, treachery, rape and more in his backstory. The civilian population funded the war efforts and provided the soldiers. The Jebusites were pushed from their lands in the same way refugees are today.

Psalm 48

This is a psalm celebrating Jerusalem as God's city. The east wind (v.8) comes from the desert and is a source of trouble. Whatever befalls it, Zion belongs to God.

II Corinthians 12:2-10

In this passage Paul begins by recounting a deeply formative experience of paradise, the third heaven (v. 4). Paul lists his weaknesses and acknowledges that it is on this basis that Christ dwells in him. God shows God's power through weakness. As Paul says, when we appear weak we are strong and so we must advocate for

refugees.

Mark 6:1-13

When Jesus returned to Nazareth the locals came out to hear what he had to say. At first they marvelled, but in a culture where honour is important, he found himself unable to do any miracles. They did not believe (v. 5,6). The disciples are sent with nothing for the journey (v.8). Like refugees the disciples do not know what lies ahead of them. They take their message to the illiterate peasants of Galilee. The gospel does not belong to the powerful and wealthy.

Prayer For Refugees

God of Peace

We hear the cry of the needy

People broken by poverty and lack of opportunity

Families divided by war and closed borders

Children who are anxious and frightened

May our prayers make the longing for peace come closer.

We hear the cry of refugees who have risked everything in a desperate search for safety

Young people who have been sent alone to find hope in a new land

Men who leave with dreams of earning money to keep families alive when there is not enough food.

Mothers who can no longer bear the dangers of life in a war zone.

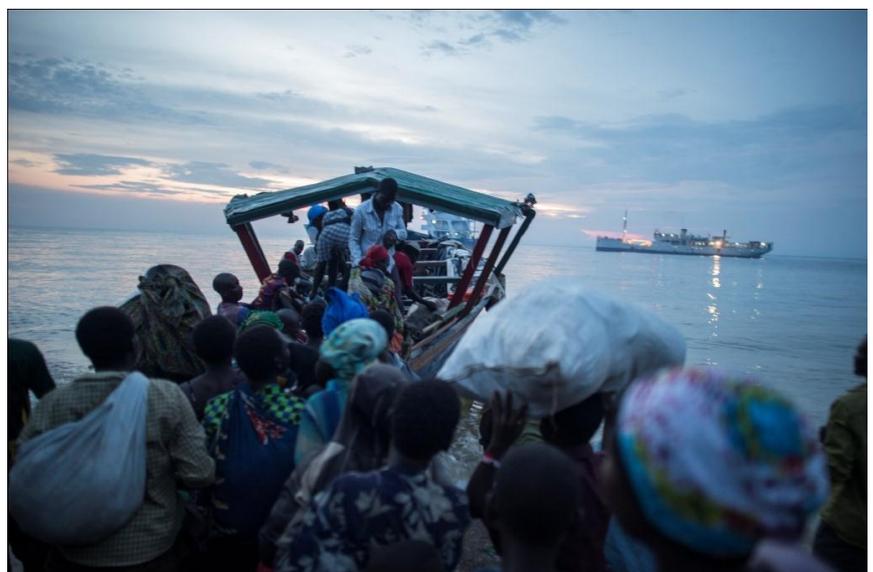
May our prayers make the longing for peace come closer.

We hear the cry of people who have seen the brokenness of our world and want change.

For those trying to protect men, women and children from the violence that surrounds them;

For reporters showing us glimpses of the life of people braving dangerous seas with no food;

For all of us who have resources we can share — giving what we can and speaking out for people





Education Specialists in Lebanon

Set up to help Palestinian refugees in 1950, DSPR Lebanon has become a mainstay for Palestinian refugees and those who have fled the conflict in Syria. The programme has a strong focus on education at a number of refugee camps. DSPR provides emergency assistance to Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and runs an agricultural training farm in Tyre, health awareness sessions, preschools, and literacy, special needs and vocational training programmes. The summer camps and tutoring of children are critical to families who have experienced so much trauma.

Please give generously to the Syria Appeal to help families survive.

In Lebanon, Syrians are not allowed to attend school and many do not have sufficient English. At the end of 2013 DSPR ran a pilot programme for 65 Syrian refugee students at the Sidon Centre, recruiting Syrian refugee teachers desperate for work. More students joined them. The teachers prepared the students for the Syrian 9th and 12th grade exams. Anxious not to fall behind, the students were determined to pass, even asking for extra tuition.

In May 2014 DSPR arranged papers, transport and accommodation for 180 of them to sit the exams in Damascus. This was not an easy task—most Syrian refugees are not allowed to re-enter Lebanon if they leave. Because of good relationships with government, DSPR negotiated special permission for the students. Later when programme head, Abu Hussein, returned to Lebanon with 138 certificates for the successful candidates, it was a cause for celebration. DSPR is the only organisation helping students get the qualifications they need.

In October 2014 220 students began their studies in cramped quarters. There are two four hour shifts six days a week taught by 15 teachers.

“Before we provide them an education, we provide them with hope.” Abu Hussein

CWS Responds to the Needs of Syria

CWS is appealing for funds to help long term partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) respond to the needs of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, especially in Lebanon and Jordan. There are no signs of an end to the conflict that is causing so much suffering for families across the region.

Join the Campaign

Write to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Immigration Michael Woodhouse asking them to increase New Zealand’s refugee quota, currently 750 people. Now a member of the Security Council, New Zealand has greater responsibility to minimise the human suffering from conflict situations. You might also consider asking New Zealand to give more aid for Syrian and Iraqi refugees by writing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully. You can write: Freepost Parliament, Parliament Buildings, Private Bag 18888, Wellington 6160.



Hamesh a tailor in Syria works as a handyman in Za’atari Camp Jordan Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

Resources

Invite local people who have migrated or come as refugees to talk about their experiences, or organise a celebration for your wider community.

A reflection by John Bluck, PowerPoint, children’s material and leaflet are available.

Reports and video material from the UNHCR at: www.unhcr.org

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

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

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