

# Prayers and Reflections

## OPENING PRAYER

Lost in the tempests out on the open seas,  
our small boats drift.  
We seek for land during endless days and endless nights.

We are the foam, floating on the vast ocean.  
We are the dust, wandering in endless space.  
Our cries are lost in the howling wind.

Without food, without water,  
our children lie exhausted until they cry no more.  
We thirst for our land,  
but are turned back from every shore.

Our distress signals rise and rise again,  
but the passing ships do not stop.  
How many boats have perished?  
How many families lie beneath the waves?

Lord Jesus, do you hear the prayer of our flesh?  
Lord, do you hear our voice from the abyss of death?

O solid shore, we long for you!  
We pray for humankind to be present today!  
We pray that hope be given us today,  
from any land.  
Amen.

Jesuit Relief Services, Australia

## REFLECTION

Reflect on the following passages. From the days of the Old Testament to Christ's teaching down to the present, what is the consistent call of our Faith regarding refugees?

"You will not oppress the alien." Exodus 23:9

"For I was a stranger . . . and you made me welcome."  
Matthew 25:35

"As people without a homeland, refugees seek a welcome in other countries of the world, which is our common home. They have rights . . . to all which nourishes and sustains them as human beings." Pope John Paul II, 1990  
Lenten Message

## CLOSING PRAYER

Brother Jesus,  
who as a child was carried into exile,  
remember all those who are deprived  
of their home or country,  
who groan under the burden of anguish and sorrow,  
enduring the burning heat of the sun,  
the freezing cold of the sea,  
or the humid heat of the forest,  
searching for a place of refuge.

Cause these storms to cease, O Christ.  
Move the hearts of those in power  
that they may respect the men and women  
whom you have created in your image;  
that the grief of refugees may be turned to joy,  
as when you led Moses and your people out of captivity.  
Amen.

Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church U.S.A.



## Refugee True/False Quiz

1. Women and children make up 80% of the world's refugees and displaced persons.
2. Refugees flee their native countries in fear of persecution.
3. Refugees are essentially immigrants.
4. The president decides how many refugees may be admitted for resettlement in the U.S.
5. The refugee admissions ceiling has risen steadily in the U.S. over the last decade.
6. New security requirements were imposed on the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program following September 11, 2001.
7. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is mandated to lead international efforts to protect refugees and displaced persons.
8. In 2002, Africa had the highest estimated number of persons falling under the mandate of the UNHCR.
9. There are thousands of Palestinian refugees registered with authorities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
10. Catholic Social Teaching supports the rights of refugees.

## Refugee True/False Quiz Answers

1. **TRUE.** Of the over 45 million refugees and displaced people in today's world, 80% are women and children.  
Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), <http://www.jesref.org>

2. **TRUE.** According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), <http://www.lirs.org/>

3. **FALSE.** Immigrants come to America by *choice*—to rejoin family members or to improve their lives. Refugees come to America by *chance*—to seek safety and protection from danger in their homelands.  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), <http://www.lirs.org/>

4. **TRUE.** Each year the president, in consultation with Congress, sets the number of refugees to be admitted for U.S. resettlement.  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), <http://www.lirs.org/>

5. **FALSE.** The admissions ceiling set in the presidential determination has dropped from a high of 142,000 in fiscal year 1993 to the current 70,000 for fiscal year 2003.  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), <http://www.lirs.org/>

6. **TRUE.** The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program was temporarily shut down following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Upon its reopening, new security requirements were imposed, and refugee arrivals continue to remain at an all time low: in the last fiscal year, only about 27, 000 of the 70,000 refugees expected to arrive in the U.S. actually made it—this was the lowest number in 25 years. Currently more than 200,000 refugees approved for resettlement in the U.S. remain stranded in desolate camps in Africa, Asia and the Middle East due to backlog in processing security clearances. To renew interest in the refugee program, the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus was founded in April 2003.  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), <http://www.lirs.org>  
"U.S. Security Backlog Strands Many Refugees in Camps Abroad" by Rachel L. Swarns, *New York Times*, June 3, 2003.

7. **TRUE.** The scope of the UNHCR's mandate includes refugees, asylum-seekers, refugees returning home, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are uprooted within their own countries.  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

8. **FALSE.** Although approximately 3 million, or nearly one-fifth of the world's refugees, are in Africa, Asia had the highest number with an estimated 8,820,700, followed by Europe with 4,855,400.  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

9. **FALSE.** Nearly 4 million Palestinian refugees are registered with authorities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

10. **TRUE.** "It is not irrelevant to draw the attention of the world to the fact that these refugees are persons and all their rights as persons must be recognized. Refugees cannot lose these rights simply because they are deprived of citizenship of their own states."  
Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, #105

## Fact Sheet: Refugees and the Catholic Church

On November 15, 2000, The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, reminding us that the call to care and the call to hospitality “is based on the rich heritage of Scripture and the Church’s teaching. The patriarchs themselves were nomads. Settled by the hand of God in the time of Abraham, they soon migrated to Egypt, where they suffered oppression and were delivered once again by God’s hand. From this experience comes a deep appreciation for the plight of the migrant [and refugee], underlined in the words of Scripture: ‘You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt’ (Ex 23:9). ‘You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt’ (Lv 19:33-34).” The Bishops note that the Torah made special provisions for refugees with the reminder that “you too were once slaves in Egypt” (Dt 16:9-12): “At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them in community stores, that the Levite who has no share in the heritage with you, and also the alien, the orphan and the widow who belong to your community, may come and eat their fill; so that the Lord, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake” (Dt 14:28-29).

The Bishops remind us “the experience of exile, oppression, and deliverance to the Promised Land is the central act of the drama of salvation for Judaism. In honor of God’s deliverance of his people, Israel was enjoined to show justice towards all: ‘For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes; who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt’ (Dt 10:17-19). Jesus echoes this tradition when he proclaims prophetically, ‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Mt 25:35)”.

The Church has remained faithful to this call to care for migrants of all kinds and has responded accordingly over the centuries. The apostolic constitution *Exsul Familia*, promulgated by Pope Pius XII in 1952, takes its name from its evocation of the ‘émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt,’ to which the pope pointed as ‘the archetype of every refugee family.’ Pope Pius XII recalls a long tradition of papal solicitude for immigrants and refugees . . .

The Second Vatican Council likewise called on the national bishops’ conferences to pay special attention to those who ‘are not adequately cared for by the ordinary pastoral ministry of the parochial clergy or are entirely deprived of it,’ including ‘the many migrants, exiles and refugees,’ and to devise solutions for them (*Christus Dominus*, #18), a call endorsed by Pope Paul VI in approving a revision of church norms regarding pastoral care for [those who must migrate] . . . .”

As Pope Paul VI noted, in words recently recalled by Pope John Paul II, “The Church can regard no one as excluded from its motherly embrace, no one as outside the scope of its motherly care. It has no enemies except those who wish to make themselves such. Its catholicity is no idle boast. It was not for nothing that it received its mission to foster love, unity and peace among men” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, #94). The way to achieve this mission was presented on January 22, 1999, when Pope John Paul II stood beneath the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City and delivered to the whole Church the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America—On the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America*.

### Discussion Questions

What image comes to you when you hear the word “refugee”? Where did you get this image? What feelings does it evoke? In what ways have you felt an alien or stranger?

What does hospitality mean to you? How can you offer hospitality to refugees as an individual? As a parish? As a nation?



## Prayer Service for Refugees

*SUGGESTED SETTING: A small table to use as a ritual center; you may want to cover the table with a cloth made in a country other than your own. Add to the table a globe; artwork of people of diverse cultures; images or photos of "home;" images or photos of people of diverse cultures; 5 candles to light as a sign of welcome and hospitality.*

### CALL TO PRAYER:

We enter this moment in solidarity with all who long for home: the 45 million refugees and displaced persons in our world, 80% of them women and children. We hold in our prayer all who flee persecution, all in flight from war or oppressive regimes; all those clinging to life outside the borders of the places they once called home. Let us make our own their suffering as we pray the words of Lamentations:

### ALL:

Remember, O God, what has befallen us.  
Look, see our disgrace.  
We have become orphans, fatherless;  
Our mothers are like widows.  
With a yoke on our neck, we are hard driven.  
We are weary.  
We are given no rest. (Lamentations 5:1-5)

### MUSIC:

*Invite all to listen to a song of exile.*  
Suggested: "God, Mother of Exiles" by Colleen Fulmer;  
"Would You Harbor Me?" by Sweet Honey in the Rock;  
or any song that speaks to the experience of being uprooted.

### READINGS: ENTERING INTO EXILE

*After each reading, the response is to light a candle of welcome.*

An uprooted one in Britain says: "I can't bear this life of hiding any more. They say I am not a refugee, but I know I will be imprisoned, tortured, killed if I return. They ask for proof. I worry about my wife and children back home. Is there anyone who cares?"

Church World Service, "Accompanying the Uprooted"

RESPONSE: Light a candle of welcome

"They had all left Kosovo the day before the NATO bombing had begun. The parents did not want to leave their home. Shefqet, retired after 25 years of working, had a heart attack three years ago and a stroke eighteen months after that. Nadire, his wife, had to retire on disability. Their reluctance to leave home was countered by the soldiers' attempt to rape Nadire."

Taken from "From the Heart of Kosovo," by Janet Yurkanin, IHM, in *Universe Updated*.

RESPONSE: Light a candle of welcome

An uprooted one, a domestic worker from Hong Kong, says: "I cry every night in bed . . . no woman should be faced with such a choice . . . Parents don't know how lucky they are to be able to hug and kiss their children every day . . . My employers don't even know that I am a mother."

Excerpted from *The Prophetic Mission of Churches in Response to Forced Displacement of People*, 1995

RESPONSE: Light a candle of welcome

"My name is Fred, and I come from Ghana. In my country I was a political activist and my life was threatened, so I fled my country. When I arrived in America, I was taken to the Elizabeth Detention Center, where I have been incarcerated. After waiting two years, I learned that my request for asylum was denied. I expect to be deported soon, and I am afraid for my life."

Taken from a conversation with a detainee in Elizabeth, NJ

REPOSE: Light a candle of welcome

"The family traveled for seven days en route to Macedonia. Erol feared for his father, whose paralyzed arm was weakening because of the cold. They spent their nights sleeping on the ground. All valuables and belongings were left behind. All their identification papers were taken from them when they left."

Taken from "From the Heart of Kosovo" by Janet Yurkanin, IHM, in *Universe Updated*.

RESPONSE: Light a candle of welcome



## Prayer Service for Refugees (continued)

### QUIET REFLECTION:

*Invite all to reflect on the stories they have just heard, and on the questions:*

What are your own memories of being uprooted, lost, disoriented, or in an unfamiliar or unwelcoming space?

What moved within you as you listened to the stories of the uprooted refugees?

How will you act to widen the space of welcome in your own heart? In the global community?

### SHARING:

*Invite all who wish to share from their reflection.*

### LITANY OF THE DISPLACED:

God of all people,  
We bring before you all who work  
for the fullness of justice,  
All who long for the widening of welcome  
to which your Gospel calls us.

RESPONSE: Open hearts, open arms, open doors in welcome!

Displaced God,  
Born in flight to parents anxious and weary,  
Born anew in those who flee oppression,  
leaving home and loved ones behind,  
And staking their lives on the hope of abundant life,  
we pray:

RESPONSE: Open hearts, open arms, open doors in welcome!

Journeying God,  
Turned away over and over again  
By our world's collective fear of the stranger, we pray:

RESPONSE: Open hearts, open arms, open doors in welcome!

Uprooted God,  
Suspended in the endless uncertainty  
that is the daily life of the refugee,  
we pray:

RESPONSE: Open hearts, open arms, open doors in welcome!

Waiting God,  
Waiting today with all who suffer separation  
from home and the familiar,  
Waiting for safe return,  
Waiting for war's end,  
Waiting for justice to be restored, we pray:

RESPONSE: Open hearts, open arms, open doors in welcome!

God of all people,  
Stir us to holy anger over the wounds of our world.  
Move us to action for justice  
Until the fullness of welcome is fulfilled in our midst.  
Amen!

## Suggestions for Action

1. Volunteer to assist refugees in your community. Contact your local churches or ecumenical organizations, Catholic Charities, and local social service agencies to see what you can do to help refugees.
2. Invite refugees living in your area to share their stories with your group. Have your group consider becoming involved with a refugee as a sponsor or mentor. See above for possible contacts.

3. Check with the organizations below for more information on their advocacy suggestions to help ensure just policies.

4. Pray for and with refugees. Reflect together on relevant passages from Scripture, e.g. Ex23:9, Lv 19:33-34, Deut 6:10-12, Ps 137, Mt 8:20, Rom 12:13, Heb 13:1-2.

## Further Resources

Jesuit Refugee Service  
USA National Office  
1616 P Street, NW Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036-1405  
Tel: 202-462-0400  
<http://www.jesref.org/>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Department of Migration and Refugee Services  
3211 4th Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
Tel: 202-541-3000  
<http://www.usccb/mrs/index.htm>

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
310 8th Street, Suite 303  
Oakland, CA 94607  
Tel: 510-465-1984  
<http://www.nnirr.org>

Refugees International  
1705 N Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: 202-828-0110  
<http://www.refintl.org>