

The background of the entire page is a textured, orange-brown color with a grainy, stippled appearance. Overlaid on this background are several black silhouettes of people walking along a path that winds from the top left towards the bottom right. The silhouettes include a family with a child on their back, a man carrying a child, a man with a suitcase, a man with a cane, and a woman holding a child's hand. The overall mood is one of journey and displacement.

**WORLD REFUGEE DAY**

# Hospitality & Hope

RESOURCES FOR **WORSHIP,**  
**LEARNING AND ACTION**



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

# WORLD REFUGEE DAY

## Hospitality & Hope

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About refugees and World Refugee Day</b>	<b>4</b>
History	4
Definitions	4
Refugee facts	5
<b>Worship resources</b>	<b>6</b>
Words of introduction	6
Prayers	6
» Opening	6
» Intercession 1	6
» Intercession 2	7
» Offering	7
» Benediction	8
Reader's theatre: Remember the refugee	8
Children's story	9
Scripture-based sermon starters	10
» The story of Ruth and Naomi	10
» The welcoming father	10
» The Hebrews leave Egypt	11
<b>Refugee stories</b>	<b>12</b>
Fawzia's story	12
Resettlement story	12
From refugee to sponsor	13
The blessing of sponsorship	13
<b>Additional resources</b>	<b>14</b>

**View the accompanying  
World Refugee Day video**



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For more information, [contact your provincial MCC office](#).

## Introduction

Stories of people on the move punctuate human history from time immemorial. The Bible itself is filled with stories of people being forced from their homes, beginning with Adam and Eve and including Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Refugees come from countries all around the world, seeking spaces of safety in many places and for many reasons.

The work of offering assistance to refugees is intensely practical work—whether that means providing humanitarian assistance (such as food, shelter and medicine), sponsorship for resettlement, or the possibility of a return home. But at MCC we believe that our work of refugee response also takes place at the spiritual level: in individual hearts and in worshiping communities. So we offer this resource as an integral part of our response to “serve in the name of Christ.”

This worship resource invites Canadian congregations to focus their worship around the plight of refugees in the context of World Refugee Day (June 20). You could also adapt this resource to use as a worship service at any time of year, especially if your congregation is in the process of sponsoring refugees. This resource contains information about the history of World Refugee Day, stories of refugee and response situations, as well as a variety of worship resources to assist you in planning a meaningful time of worship in your congregation. It includes links to additional sources for those who wish to learn more.

**We invite you to pray, worship, learn, give and be inspired to offer hospitality and hope to refugees.**



## About refugees and World Refugee Day

### HISTORY

World Refugee Day was officially recognized as a celebration by the United Nations (UN) in 2000, and was first celebrated on June 20, 2001. Prior to that, many regions had celebrated their own versions of refugee day, the largest being African Refugee Day. The date for **World Refugee Day** was chosen to align with the day that African Refugee Day is celebrated. The day is intended to “commemorate the strength, courage, and resilience of millions of refugees.” More than 100 countries participate in celebrating World Refugee Day each year.

### DEFINITIONS

Definitions adapted from the United Nations Refugee Agency.

There are many terms used for people who are displaced, including: refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP), asylum seekers, stateless persons and migrants. These can be confusing: what exactly do these terms mean, and to whom do they refer? Following are some definitions of how these different groups are classified.

**Refugees** People who are outside their home country due to fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political group and are unable to return to their home country or be protected by their home government. Refugees flee into a new country in order to preserve their own lives or freedom and are given forms of protection by the host country. This definition is based on the **1951 Refugee Convention**, signed by many countries including Canada.

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)** People who have been forced to flee from their home but have not yet crossed an international border to become a refugee.

**Asylum seekers** People who claim to be refugees and seek international protection but whose claims have not yet been evaluated.

**Stateless people** People who are not legal citizens of any state, making it impossible for them to access social services or have their human rights protected.

**Migrants** People who choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, to seek education, to reunify a family, or other reasons. Migrant is a larger category of people on the move, which could include convention refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers and economic migrants.



## REFUGEE FACTS

**Note:** The numbers and statistics above were the latest available on March 31, 2022. These numbers can change quickly. Please refer to the hyperlinks for latest numbers.

The The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) registers and protects refugees. According to their **records** there are **more than 20 million refugees** in the world. This figure does not include internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, stateless people or migrants.

There were **82.4 million displaced people** at the **end of 2020**.

The UNHCR has not yet released numbers for 2021, but they are expected to have increased.

The official number of people who are stateless is hard to know, as their existence is largely unrecorded by the states in which they reside. However the estimate is that there were more than four million stateless people at the end of **2020**.

### ***Where do refugees come from?***

Refugees come from many countries, including some from Canada. But in 2020, 68 per cent of all refugees and people displaced outside of their home countries came from just five places, Syria (6.7 million), Venezuela (4.0 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.2 million) and Myanmar (1.1 million).

### ***Where do refugees go?***

Many people who flee their home countries don't go far. They often end up living in neighbouring countries, hoping that they'll be able to return home as soon as it's safe. In 2020, 73 per cent of refugees and people displaced abroad were living in countries right next to their country of origin.

### ***What about Canada?***

Canada has 2.9 refugees per 1,000 people, and ranks 59th globally for refugees per capita. **(Data from UNCHR Global Trends report 2020, annex table 21)**



## WORSHIP RESOURCES

### WORDS OF INTRODUCTION

June 20 is World Refugee Day. In a world full of potential for understanding and connectedness people are alienated from their communities, fleeing their homes in numbers not seen since the Second World War. In a world where suspicion of the other and fear of the stranger have become common place, how do the followers of Christ respond? How do we bear witness to hope?

Our expression of worship through prayers, songs of praise and preaching is a declaration of faith that in spite of uncertainty God is present in our world. We believe that God can and will act for justice and peace and that we are co-labourers in that action. We gather today to pray for strength and boldness. We remind ourselves of God's faithfulness past and present. We look for ways to engage current crises with compassion that will meet human need, build peace and honour the name of the Prince of Peace.

### PRAYERS *Opening Prayer*

Loving God. We gather in this place to worship you, to fellowship together and to learn your way of truth. As we focus on World Refugee Day, we acknowledge that many people do not have a space and a place to call home. We pray that we would be attentive to the movements of people in the world and the movement of your spirit in our hearts. Our desire is to be faithful to your calling to us, O God, to be people of compassion and hope. May this time of singing, praising, prayer and listening form us to be such people. Amen.

#### *Prayer of Intercession 1*

Dear God. We ask for your mercy on all your people in all places. We pray for those who have fled their homes. We pray that they would experience safety and comfort. We pray that in the heat of summer they would find shelter from the sun's blaze, and in the winter a place of warmth. For those who have experienced trauma and violence, we pray that there would be healing and solace. For those who have been separated from loved ones, we pray that they may be reunited.

For those who are offering shelter—by circumstance or choice—may they experience the gift of offered hospitality. May there be enough to share so that resentment against newcomers does not build up. We also pray for those churches and communities who are ministering to the displaced in their own land—grant them strength, courage and love to carry on. We also pray for the perpetrators of conflict and violence whose action or inaction causes people to become refugees. We ask that they would renounce violence and would adopt policies of justice and peace for those they govern. Amen.



## ***Prayer of Intercession 2***

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember that in your infancy you were a refugee. The political leaders of your country sought to end your life, and so your parents fled with you to another country in secret. We don't know how long before you were able to return to your home and your people.

Help us, O Lord, to grow in compassion for those who are displaced from their homes in our day. Help us not to see them only as problems, statistics or threats. Help us to see refugees as fellow humans who have been forced to flee their homes, and as people who have gifts to share with us.

O God, we know refugees and displaced persons must make excruciating decisions, and we ask for your mercy upon them. We ask for mercy for parents who take children from their homes. Mercy for children who leave parents too weak to travel. Mercy for those who choose to stay for whatever reasons. We ask for mercy for those whose housing is inadequate – cold in winter, hot in summer, insufficient for privacy or hygiene or satisfaction. Have mercy on your children who have left their homes, O Lord.

O God, we know—sometimes too well—the causes of displacement and migration. We pray for the situations that have led to the refugee crises in our world. We pray for those who promote extremist ideologies, that they would change their ways and not choose violence. We pray for repressive regimes, that they would seek to engage people in building freedom.

Help us, O Lord, to be compassionate and to know how we can help those who have been displaced. Help us to know when it is time to provide relief, when it is time for resettlement, and when advocacy for peace and change is what is needed most. Give us courage and strength to be people of compassion and justice in the face of complex and overwhelming demands.

We know that you love all people, dear Lord. Help us to be the instruments of your love and peace in the world. Amen.

## ***Offering Prayer***

Dear God. We give you thanks for what we have. For jobs, homes, security and for money that we can choose to give to others. We pray that our gifts to help others today would provide food, shelter and a measure of hope for those who need it. Help us to have generous hearts, not only in what we give but in how we think. May we be generous in loving and caring for refugees and see them as people who you love and care for as well. We pray that wars would cease and that the cause of so much dislocation and displacement would end. Until that time



let us not lack in energy and willingness to reach out to those who suffer and have been forced from their homes. We pray in the name of Christ who reached out to all who suffer to bring them into welcoming community. Amen.

### **Benediction**

Our worship here today has been a place of refuge for our spirits. As we go into the world may we be mindful of all who have been dislocated from their homes. May the God whose own son lived in exile open our hearts to care for those who need love and lodging, hospitality and hope. Amen.

## **READER'S THEATRE**

Remember the refugee

*The following reader's theatre for two voices is adapted from one prepared by Ben Schatzlein and Cody Turnbull, students at Providence College, Otterburne, Manitoba in February 2016. Scripture texts are drawn from the English Standard Version. Throughout, the word "sojourner" has been replaced with "refugee."*

**A:** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)

**B:** Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt as a refugee, for the famine was severe in the land. (Genesis 12:10)

**A:** Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be refugees in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13)

**B:** Love the refugee, therefore, for you were refugees in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:19)

**A:** Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a refugee with you, a guest, like all my fathers. (Psalm 39:12)

**B:** During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. (Exodus 2:23-25)

**A:** You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the refugees who are in your land within your towns. (Deuteronomy 24:14)



**B:** You shall not oppress a refugee. You know the heart of a refugee, for you were refugees in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

**A:** And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the refugee: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 23:22)

**B:** The LORD watches over the refugees; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Psalm 146:9)

**A:** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrew 13:2)

**B:** For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matthew 25:35)

**A:** These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

### CHILDREN'S STORY



To share this story, enlarge and print this photo, or project it onto a screen.

► **Source.**

This is Ibrahim (on the left) and this is Larama (on the right). (Surnames are not available.)

Ibrahim and Larama live in Minawao refugee camp in Cameroon. They live here with their mother, two younger siblings, and 33,000 other people. They live here because it is not safe for them to live in their home. It's not safe because there is war in the country that they lived in. They used to live in Nigeria with their whole family, but their home got attacked and their father was killed. Ibrahim was attacked too, but his sister Larama found him and saved his life. He had to stay in the hospital for four and a half months before he was able to leave.

Ibrahim is a refugee. He has had a lot of really sad things happen in his life. His life probably looks different than yours does. But I bet there are a lot of things you have in common with him.

He has brothers and sisters, do you?

He goes to school, do you?

He can count to 100, can you?

He likes to play soccer (but calls it football), do you like to play any sports?

He likes to sing and dance, do you?

He likes to play with his friends, do you?

Sometimes it's easy to see what is different about people, and sometimes those differences can seem pretty big. But there are always (and I mean always) at least two things that you have in common with someone, no matter how different you might think that person is. The first is that you are both people, and the second is that God loves you both very very much.

## SCRIPTURE-BASED SERMON STARTERS

### ***The Story of Naomi and Ruth*** — The Book of Ruth

Naomi and her husband leave their home in Bethlehem because of food shortages. They resettle in another land. There, tragedy besets Naomi and she loses her husband and both of her sons. She opts to return to her homeland, embittered by her experiences. But she has made enough of an impression on her one daughter-in-law that Ruth returns to Israel with Naomi. They support each other and ultimately Ruth marries Boaz. Out of this story of migration and resettlement comes the ancestry of both King David and Jesus the Messiah. God's love is not bound by national boundaries, ethnic kinship or even religion. God works through Naomi the Israelite and Ruth the Moabite to bring about his redemptive plans for the world.

The story of Naomi and Ruth bears elements similar to displaced people today. There is a natural disaster, a famine in this case, that causes people to leave their home. There is tragedy in the death of Naomi's family. There are widows, which are common among displaced populations. There is a struggle to integrate into a new community. Ultimately, there is integration, and this integration changes the shape of the community that welcomes these refugees. At the end, there is a good reminder that refugees are often in the background of a people's story and that story needs to be told to keep us open to the displaced today.

### ***The Welcoming Father*** — Luke 15:11-32

Interpretation of this story often focuses on the dissolute living of the son and how his lifestyle made the welcoming embrace of the father so remarkable. However, the son's circumstances are to a certain extent beside the point of the story. The key point of the story is that the father acts with compassion and welcomes the desperate son with open arms. Not only does the father act in welcome but he advocates for this younger son with the elder son who was less willing to accept. As a faith community Christ invites us to be welcoming and non-judgmental, and to share our resources. The sources of desperation in our world appear to be without limit, however, the grace and



love of God is also without limit. We are invited to embody God's love and grace by welcoming and accepting people in desperate circumstances and by acting as advocates on their behalf.

***The Hebrews Leave Egypt*** — Book of Exodus; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-22, 24:17-22

The story of the Israelite departure from Egypt is dramatic and central to Jewish understandings of faith. It is also a story of migration, landlessness and desperation. In the course of the story the people yearn for the relative comforts of Egypt — they want to go to the only home they have ever known. They regularly abandon the commands of God, they build and worship idols, and they complain bitterly about their lot. They face danger from without and from within, and their journey is fraught with peril. When they finally arrive in the new land, they are by no means welcomed with open arms. What are they to learn from their experience of oppression and slavery? How might their refugee story shape their response to others? In what ways are they to become a new people according to the ways of God?

## Refugee Stories

### A REFUGEE CAMP LIKE A CITY

Learn more about refugee  
life in Aida

To an outsider, at first glance, Aida camp appears to be just like any other town in the West Bank, filled with multi-storey buildings and paved roads. Founded in 1950, it has taken on a sense of permanence. Families living there were displaced in 1948 after what's known as the War of Independence in Israel and the Nakba (Catastrophe) for Palestinians. More than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes in villages across what is now Israel. Though it's been almost 70 years, most still long for the right to return home. Even children and parents who have lived their entire lives in a refugee camp want to return to a home they may have never seen. [Learn more about Palestinian refugees.](#)

Living in Aida camp comes with practical challenges. There is no health-care centre. Residents have access to water only every other week, filling up black, rooftop water tanks and rationing their use to make it last. There's no sewer system. And there is a constant military presence.

For now, living behind the separation wall next to military checkpoints is the reality for the refugees living in Aida camp. Children will continue to watch the arrests of their fathers, brothers and friends. They will keep waking up in the middle of the night to find soldiers in their homes.

### RESETTLEMENT STORY

► Source.

"Hello, hello, hello." The welcoming voice of Yhya Al Kurdi invites you into his home. He boasts about his wife Fatoum's cooking, enjoying that people are coming to share food with them. Yhya and Fatoum have recently arrived in Canada from Syria with two of their seven children and are living in Winnipeg. Their other children are in Lebanon, Algeria and Germany, with more family members remaining in Syria.

Their life in Syria was good. Yhya was a teacher and a writer, their children are doctors and lawyers. They owned their own home and car. But when the war came, they had to leave. Hoping that the war would be temporary, they sheltered in nearby communities, but as the situation worsened, they realized that they needed to leave. Yhya "took [the family] to Lebanon so they would not see anything of the war." Life in Lebanon was not good, housing was inadequate and jobs did not pay enough to cover their expenses.

Eventually, the family applied for resettlement with the United Nations and were matched with the River East Church in Winnipeg through MCC. They arrived in Canada in November 2015.



The Al Kurdi's are beginning to adjust to life in Canada. They appreciate the help they have received, but still mourn for the family and the life left behind. In Yhya's words: "I'm still sad, in shock. But when I see people welcoming me, asking how I'm doing starting life here, I feel much better."

## FROM REFUGEE TO SPONSOR

- **Read more of this story from "The journey of refugee sponsorship: Nhung Tran-Davies"**

At the young age of five, Nhung Tran-Davies was a refugee fleeing from war-torn Vietnam with her family of five. In 1979, she was sponsored by a couple in Alberta and started a new life as a Canadian. She is now a two-time refugee sponsor.

Nhung's sponsorship experience has had a significant impact on her life. "I would say it changed my life because it gave me a glimpse into the hearts and minds of my sponsors – their dedication to humanity, and all the work and commitment that goes into it."

For Nhung, the most rewarding aspect of sponsorship has been her new friends becoming her family. "I feel so blessed having new sisters and brothers to walk alongside with on this journey of life ... My most favourite moment, however, is when I see our own children play joyously with their children. To see their love for one another is a promise that the future will be better."

Nhung's message to others considering becoming a refugee sponsor? "You should not pass up the opportunity to become one."

## THE BLESSING OF SPONSORSHIP

- **View this story as a video from 2016: Sponsoring refugees: "Our lives are being enriched"**

An extended family in British Columbia became refugee sponsors and, with MCC's assistance, were matched with a refugee family from Eritrea. Most of the B.C. family members had not even heard of Eritrea, but they quickly got to work learning about the country's location, culture, language and food. Their worldview grew rapidly.

The host family continued to learn new things from their Eritrean friends. They learned that parents around the world simply want to provide for their children. They learned to treasure the freedom and security that they take for granted and to recognize the resilience and strength of refugees. The host children gained new playmates and learned to practise compassion.

The experience of hosting a refugee family was not a one-way exchange; there was mutual benefit. The refugee family benefited from the generosity of the host family, and the host family benefited from what they received from their guests. As one of the hosts said: "Our lives are being enriched."

For more stories please see the [UNHCR](#) or the [MCC Canada](#) websites.



## How can you get involved?

One way that you can make a real difference for refugees is to get involved in refugee sponsorship. Over the years, MCC has helped groups sponsor thousands of refugees through the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. This program is designed to resettle refugees identified by the United Nations Refugee Agency who currently do not have any family, friends or connections in sponsoring countries to help them get to a place of safety. These refugees are selected because they are the most vulnerable in their location and are often in need of protection, have medical concerns or are part of women-headed households.



Wanda Waldner (left), Najwa Hussein Al Mohamad, Elaine Hofer, sitting. Reyad Alhamoud, Paul Waldner holding Lee Waldner, 1. (Photo courtesy of Ava Waldner)

### **They are selected because they are strangers in need of your help.**

Sponsoring refugees through the BVOR program offers you a life-changing opportunity to provide hospitality and hope to strangers who are longing for a safe place to call home. It also provides us with the opportunity to put the words of James 2:14-17 into action and give our faith some feet.

Sponsoring groups can be church congregations or community groups who can provide resources and support for the newcomers. Green Acres colony together with Enes and Fata from Wawanesa, Man., sponsored Reyad, Najwa and their two children who came to Canada in 2016 from Syria. This has been a life-changing experience, not only for the refugee family, but for the sponsoring group as well.

*“This has been incredible. It’s been about vulnerability, trust and communication. It’s about taking risks and daring to love and serve,” said Elaine Hofer, a member of the sponsorship group.*

To learn about the colony’s experience in sponsoring a family and to hear from Reyad, visit <https://mcccanada.ca/stories/our-family-here>.

If you’re interested in becoming a refugee sponsor you can check out our sponsorship FAQ [here](#), or get in touch with **your local MCC office** who can help you figure out if sponsorship is right for you.

