

Refugees

Understanding the immigration status of refugees

*Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life,
"Get up and go with your household, and settle wherever you can;
for the Lord has called for a famine, and it will come on the land for seven years."*

*So the woman got up and did according to the word of the man of God;
she went with her household and settled in the land of the Philistines for seven years. **2Kings 8:1-2***

Information:

Individuals and families who flee their homes because of persecution, famine, or war are classified by the UN as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). However, if they manage to escape their country and enter another country, they become "refugees" and are protected by international law. These families and individuals often seek shelter in refugee camps where they are required to complete paperwork with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to be officially recognized as a refugee. They will have to wait, six years or more, to be resettled after their application is approved. The main countries participating in the refugee resettlement program include: the United States, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Norway, and New Zealand. World-wide there are approximately 24.5 million IDP in 52 countries and 9.9 million refugees.¹

When resettled to the US, the family is eligible for a variety of services provided by the federal government in conjunction with state and local organizations who rely on volunteers and gifts from the general public. These services will help them settle into the US and include: English classes, job training, and access to affordable housing and medical care.

Insight:

The US resettles the most refugees of all countries participating in the program combined. However, that number has been

steadily decreasing over the last several years and dipped below 70,000 after a high of 231,000. Since September 11, there has been a rapid decrease in refugees accepted to the resettlement program in the US. At current levels, approximately two out of every 1,000 refugees are settled in the US.

The over 24 million IDP often have no hope of being resettled outside their home country, so it is up to the international community to encourage the countries where they reside to treat them humanely and respond quickly to their situation. This can be accomplished by providing for their support after they leave home, offering protection from murder and rape, and doing more to protect the civil population from national battles and wars. The vast majority of IDP are women and children who are especially vulnerable to rape and abuse as they flee their homes in search of safety.

Invitation to Act:

June 20 is World Refugee Day, a day to remember the millions who have been forcibly uprooted by persecution and violence. For Sunday services, consider planning special events or liturgy that uplifts refugees and their plight. Consider inviting



¹ UN Refugee Agency, www.unhcr.org.

a local refugee agency to come and share stories and details of their work with new immigrants. Visit the Presbyterian Disaster Relief website for worship materials and resources, www.pcusa.org/pda.

Sponsor refugees and help them integrate into US culture through material and spiritual support. Refugee resettlement programs provide resources to congregations wishing to sponsor a refugee family, visit the Presbyterian Disaster Relief website, www.pcusa.org/pda to learn more about sponsoring refugees.

Learn about the lengthy process to become a refugee eligible for resettlement by visiting the website of the US Committee for Immigrants and Refugees at www.refugee.org then educate the local community about this issue.

Contact elected officials and ask them to reexamine the "material support" clause in the USA Patriot Act and the Real ID Act. These laws bar people who have supported terrorist and terrorist organizations by providing material support to prevent terrorist from entering the US. However, many refugees have been forced to provide meals or housing to their oppressors and rapists and now they are being barred from entering the US, which further punishes those traumatized by war and violence. For more information visit www.rcusa.org and search for "material support" for a vast array of information and press releases on this important topic.

Inquire:

The stories of our faith ancestors recount their life with God. At points in their journey, they could be classified as refugees. Israel spent 40 years in the desert, were later forced out of their land by the Babylonians, the Shunammite

woman and her family were forced into the land of the Philistines, and even Jesus and his family were sent to Egypt to escape persecution. Yet God continued to be present in the midst of their travels, migrating with them. Christians can pray to God who is ever present especially where there is suffering to help refugees and help those of us comfortable in our homes to be present with God and join the effort to find a home for the some 9 million refugees being housed at refugee camps across the globe.

Holy God you traveled with the Israelites and have often sent your people on the move throughout history to escape persecution. During these times you have been present showing yourself as a pillar of fire or cloud of dust. God help us be Christ in the world, your pillar of fire urging for the just and humane treatment of your people on the move in today's world. Please give leaders of countries where violence, war, and oppression force people to abandon their homes, carrying all their life's work in a small bundle. The compassion and mercy needed to work for a lasting peace in their country. Help those of us with resources to unclench our fists and reach out a hand to embrace and welcome those traumatized by war. In the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God with us, we pray. Amen.

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