



Refugee Sunday: A Church Resource

Here's an idea for putting your *Willow Creek Global Leadership Summit* learnings to work: lead your church as agents of change in crises half a world away—transforming death and suffering to life and hope!

Your church can be *God's Love* to the single mother in South Sudan, forced to forage for greens along a roadside to feed her children, or to the young family struggling in Jordan, anxious about their future after fleeing their home in Syria with only what they could carry.

Consider having a Sunday focus on refugees and displaced people, using the resources here. We've focused on two crises where help is needed now: the *hunger crisis in parts of Africa*, and the *Syrian refugee crisis*. You'll find background points, stories, scripture-based talking points, and worship and prayer resources.

Churches are instruments of God's life-saving grace among the world's most vulnerable. It's time to lead.

Three things your church can do:

1. Take up a one-time special offering or host a Refugee Sunday

Lead your church in a pragmatic response to the needs of refugees by raising relief funds. Your gift will provide emergency food, water, medicine, shelter and other needed support. Please use the donation form found online at: churches.worldvision.ca/refugee-sunday/

2. Commit to regularly pray for refugees and displaced people

Connect with refugees in your prayer life with God. You can use the *Prayer Points* later in this document, or simply pray into the stories you find here, in the media, or in your personal or church connections.

3. Continue to assist and welcome refugees in your community

Many churches have opened their hearts to welcome refugees into their communities. Many of our children are experiencing new classmates that have come to Canada from difficult circumstances. What does it mean for your church to “welcome the stranger?”

Africa: resilience in the face of drought and conflict

When people live day to day, dependent on the crops they scratch out of small plots of land, and the rains don't come, then just staying alive becomes a daily challenge. This is the case for parts of Africa, where more than 4 million children under age five are currently at risk of starvation.

From Sudan to South Africa, countries in the eastern part of Africa have experienced multiple failed rains, magnified by a particularly strong El Nino effect. Across Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya, children face malnutrition or extreme food shortages, with more than 800,000 boys and girls severely malnourished and struggling to survive.

In some countries, conflict exacerbates the crisis. This is the case in South Sudan where 5.5 million people face the threat of famine and are in desperate need of food and water. Almost 4 million are displaced, fleeing ongoing conflict in the young country. Hundreds of thousands have fled into northern Uganda, including thousands of children arriving without their parents, who have been lost or killed.



A Kenyan family arrives home with food supplies from World Vision.

Together, we respond

With your support, World Vision is bringing food, clean water, protection and care to children and families. In Uganda, as refugees arrive, we help with registrations, nutritious meals and core relief items. We also provided critical support for unaccompanied or separated minors.

As of May, 2017, in the East Africa countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Somalia, we've assisted more than 1.5 million people with food aid, income assistance, clean water, basic healthcare and more. We've helped protect children's rights given the stressed conditions families find themselves in, and we've supported children in continuing their education, despite the dislocations.

One family's story

Story and photos by Mark Nonkes and Max Moser, WV Communications

At a health clinic in rural Somaliland, Deeqa kisses her three-year-old daughter on the forehead. “She was so sick, I thought she would die,” says Deeqa while holding Mushtar on her lap. Just eight months earlier, Mushtar was severely malnourished and almost succumbed to a common cold.

Two years of drought had killed all the family's goats and cattle, robbing them of their income, but also of their major food source and their life savings—everything was in the animals. The family had to give up on the only life they knew. Deeqa, her husband, and their seven children moved to town, relying on a relative who provided space in a small yard.



Eight months before this June, 2017 photo, Mushtar nearly died of malnutrition.

A lack of food led Mushtar to become very thin and weak. When a cold virus attacked, her immune system couldn't fight back. Mushtar began vomiting and couldn't stop. Her temperature spiked. Deeqa worried her daughter, her last born, wouldn't survive.



Red indicates acute malnutrition. (World Vision clinic, April, 2017)

Mushtar was rushed to the clinic, where she was given emergency medication and high energy biscuits—cookies that are fortified with protein, vitamins and minerals. It saved her life. After just two months, Mushtar was completely recovered and at a healthy weight.

With infants, the results are also miraculous. Muna Omar, a nurse who leads World Vision's child nutrition project in Somaliland, explains that the drought has forced mothers, who are themselves malnourished, to rely on feeding their babies breastmilk only, long after the time they are supposed to be supplementing breastmilk with food. “The nutrition packs prevented children from slipping away. It's combatting the worst effects of malnutrition.”

World Vision, together with the World Food Programme, has provided 16,612 children and 5,684 mothers with supplementary foods and nutrition packs to help malnourished children gain weight and become healthy.

Syria: healing physical and psychological wounds



Syrian refugee children in Lebanon use drawing to express their feelings in a World Vision program.

The Syria crisis has now been raging for more than six years. It surfaces in our Canadian consciousness from time to time, as when a shocking photograph of a child—badly wounded, or dead—streams across our media channels. But for the Syrian people, loss and pain are daily companions.

More than six million people have been forced from their homes within Syria, fleeing Aleppo and other centres of conflict, and pouring into new areas which are already troubled and insecure. Another five million have fled Syria as refugees. Children face challenges no child should ever endure: missing school, working as child labourers, and girls more vulnerable to early marriage. A generation's childhood is at risk of being lost due to this conflict.

Together, we stand in solidarity

Thanks to donors, World Vision's staff and partners are on the front lines of this crisis supporting the Syrian people wherever they are. We have programs in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, bringing aid and hope to children, families and communities.

Last year, our Syria Response supported almost 2.3 million people—half of them children—with food and cash assistance, water, sanitation, medical assistance and winter supplies. We also support education and overall child protection, including establishing Child Friendly Spaces where children have a chance to reconnect with how childhood should be.

Syrian refugee children draw out their feelings

Story: Kathryn Reid; WV US. Photos: WV staff

When Faras, 11, draws a picture of his past in Syria, he sketches an idyllic landscape with a smiling sun, a rushing river, and a green field where he and his brother once cared for sheep. Habib, 9, instead uses a black crayon to outline a helicopter dropping bombs.

Given the opportunity to draw their past, present, and future, young Syrian refugee children in a Child Friendly Space in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon express a wide range of feelings.

That’s entirely appropriate, says Bassima, the center supervisor, who is also a Syrian refugee, “We have a past that is both beautiful and ugly.”

Animators, the adults who lead activities for different age groups of refugee children, don’t ask them about their painful experiences and losses she says. “We provide a peaceful place for them to feel their freedom. It’s a safe place for them to experience feelings and memories.”



Habib, 9, draws bombs that killed members of his extended family.



Mayass, 11, wants to be “a bird and live in freedom” in the future.

Ahmad, a classroom animator for a group of 10- to 12-year-olds, stands in a circle of 12 boys and girls who mimic his motions as he pantomimes raising an umbrella. The Child-Friendly Space provides an “umbrella of comfort and safety over your head,” he tells them.

Then the children and their animators draw, talk, and share their observations and their feelings about the past, present and future.

For the present, says Huda, another animator, “Every day there is something sad [the children hear] about relatives in Syria. They need support not to be overwhelmed by sadness.”

And the future?

“The future is very important to us, the future for these children,” says Huda. “If we create this peaceful place for children, we’ve done what we can do.”

Sermon or discussion ideas

1. Loving the sojourner

“Love the sojourner...for you were sojourners...” Deuteronomy 10:19

As we think of refugees it might be helpful to think of ways we too are refugees. Even though you will not find the word “refugee” in the Scriptures, the term “sojourner” is applied to God’s people:

- A. God’s people are sojourners.
 - a. A sojourner in the Bible can be a guest, or a pilgrim.
 - b. The sojourner can stay for a short or a long time.
 - c. A sojourner in the Bible might flee from famine, or persecution, or be a victim of war, or economic injustice.
 - d. A sojourner might be escaping grief, or have been carried off into captivity.
- B. We all are refugees in a land to which we don’t ultimately belong.
 - a. We are citizens of a Kingdom whose King is God. (“Metoicos” – Resident Aliens)
 - b. We have all been in places and times of transition. What difference does it make when you have a community that walks with you?
 - c. Today’s headline-making sojourners are, in fact, brothers and sisters in God’s family.
- C. God calls us to love sojourners because in each one, God’s image is found.
 - a. To love the sojourner is to love God and to love ourselves. See Gen. 3:22; Gen. 37-46; 1 Chr. 29:15-16; Heb. 11; Acts 7; Phil 3:20-21)
- D. Jesus identifies with the refugee (in Egypt after his birth). He understands the life of the sojourner and wanderer. They are made in his image (see Gen. 1:26,28; Ps. 107; Matt. 2:19-21; Matt. 8:20, Matt. 12:1; Matt. 25:31-46)

2. Who you invite to the party

Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Lk. 14:21

Luke 14:7-24 – When we invite people to a party, we usually invite people we know, who share the same interests as we do. Jesus challenges us about whom we include in our fellowship and whom we exclude from it.

- A. The story of the Wedding Feast shows how the kingdom of God transcends our limits.
 - a. There is no limit to who can be invited – including the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.
 - b. Think about what it is that stops you from inviting those who are different into your parties.

- c. Reflect upon what it feels like to be left out, forgotten, marginalized, ignored and unwanted. The welcome of the kingdom is for everyone to come.
 - d. Remember when you were a stranger in your community or when you first came to Canada.
 - e. Think about how God affirms the human dignity of all of us, including the marginalized, Consider how you can participate in this affirmation of the identity and human dignity of strangers.
- B. In Christ we are no longer strangers, but beloved children and heirs according to His promise. (see Eph. 2:11-22, 19; Gal. 13:29)
- a. Those who are far, are brought near.
 - b. We are welcomed into the family of God.
 - c. Family is what every person longs for, because it is the place where we belong.
 - d. As we invite the stranger in our midst, we have a taste of the kingdom.
- C. God's people are deemed obedient followers and blessed when they show compassion to the foreigner and stranger (see Josh 20; Heb. 13:1-2; Deut. 24:19-21; Deut. 27:19; Is. 58:6-11; Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 14:13-14).
- D. A common theme of Scripture is God's care for the foreigner, widow and orphan. (see Lev. 19:32-34; Deut. 10:18-19; 27:19; 24:17-22; Ps. 9:9; Ps. 105; Ps. 146:9; Prov. 28:27; Is. 25:4; 58:6- 11; James 1:27; Luke 10:29-37)
- a. No limits of ethnicity, religion or nationality. The person in need is one's neighbour.
 - b. We are to stand up for the refugee, sharing of our resources even to the point of selling our possessions in order that they may have enough. (see Gen. 18; Ex. 2, Deut. 24:19-21; 14:28-29; 26:12; I Kings 17:7-16; Josh. 20; Jer. 5:5-7; Luke 9:3-5; Luke 12:33; Rom 12:13; Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9)
 - c. Hospitality is a sign of a grateful and obedient heart. (Luke 14:12; Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:13)
 - d. Hospitality allows us to entertain angels unaware, and minister to the Lord Jesus. (Heb. 13:2, Matt. 25:35)

Worship Planning Resource

Understanding there is a range of liturgy, worship expressions and sacred moments, below are suggested elements that may help you to plan a Refugee Sunday.

A. Call to Worship Elements:

Invocation:

The early church gathered to worship, pray and learn together. They opened their homes, shared their food and sold their possessions to provide for each other. Let us learn from them, from their radical hospitality, and let us be a people who sow love and hope.

Responsive Reading 1:

(taken from Ps. 81:10, Eph. 2:19, 1 Jn. 4:11, Heb. 13:2)

Leader: Let us come to worship the God who brought our people out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of bondage.

People: We are no longer strangers and sojourners, but are fellow citizens with the people of God, and members of the household of God.

Leader: If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

People: By showing hospitality to strangers, we entertain angels and welcome Jesus in our midst.

Responsive Reading 2:

(taken from James 1:17, Mic. 6:8, Amos 5:24, James 1:27, Is. 58:7-8, Matt. 25:35 and Hos. 14:2)

Leader: God our Father, whatever is good and perfect comes from you. You never change. What you ask of your people has never changed.

People: You have told us, O Lord, what is required: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with You.

Leader: What kind of faith pleases your heart?

People: Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

Leader: Holy, Holy, Holy Spirit...move us to action:

People: So that justice rolls like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Leader: In helping the marginalized, we are serving the Lord Jesus:

People: For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

Leader: Open our eyes, minds, and hearts; accept that which is good:

All: We offer our worship—the fruit of our lips to you, our God. Amen.

B. Prayer Elements:

Prayer 1:

Open my eyes that they may see the deepest needs of men and women;
Move my hands that they may feed the hungry.
Touch my heart that it may bring warmth to the despairing;
Teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers;
Let me share my possessions to clothe the naked;
Give me the care that strengthens the sick;
Make me share in the quest to set the prisoners free;
In sharing our anxiety and our love,
Our poverty and our prosperity,
We partake of your divine presence. Amen.

Source: Canaan Banana, former President of Zimbabwe

Prayer 2:

Leader: Lord Jesus, who fled the wrath of Herod,

People: Be with those who must flee the injustice of others.

Leader: Lord Jesus, who had nowhere to lay your head,

People: Be with those who have no land to call their home.

Leader: For the refugees who have fled oppression in their own countries and who are seeking new lives in new lands;

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the refugees in Syria and throughout the Middle East

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the refugees who have arrived in Europe and those who have come to Canada

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the refugees throughout Eastern Africa

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the refugees who have fled starvation in their own countries and who are seeking nourishment and fresh, clean water;

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

All: Help us, Lord, who are the privileged inn-keepers of our day, to find room for those who have been driven from their homelands for political, racial, or religious reasons. Amen.

Source: Adapted from Australian Prayer Fellowship Handbook 1981

C. Videos

You might wish to show one of two short videos located on Youtube. They are also available for download at this [Dropbox location](#)

Hunger in East Africa <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8jXEqm6toE>

What would you take (Syrian refugees) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50Budn3Cb1I>

D. Music Elements:

Contemporary Worship:

Everlasting God – Chris Tomlin
God of Justice – Tim Hughes
Great Are You Lord - Jason Ingram
Hosanna – Brooke Fraser
Jesus Lord of Heaven – Phil Wickham
You Never Let Go – Matt Redman
Your Grace Is Enough – Chris Tomlin

Hymns:

All People That On Earth Do Well
Be Still My Soul (Finlandia)
Fairest Lord Jesus
I Surrender All
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
Lead on O King Eternal
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

E. Benediction Elements

Benediction 1

God of the stranger, you have been made known to us in Jesus Christ, who was born as a migrant and exiled as a refugee. Lead us as we leave this place of worship to build a community rooted in hospitality to strangers and justice for all. Amen.

Benediction 2

O God, we are your witnesses to your people here and around the world. As we have been welcomed into your presence, we leave to welcome others to the same. Go with us, and strengthen our resolve to embrace those we meet with your love. Amen.

Prayer Points for Refugee Sunday

In Eastern Africa, more than 4 million children under the age of five are at risk of starvation. Failed rains have driven families from their homes in search of food. Others have been uprooted because of conflict. As a result, millions of refugees are on the move or in precarious living conditions.

More than 5 million Syrians have fled their country since conflict began in 2011. Another 6.3 million are displaced within the country. Half of those affected are children.

In the face of these overwhelming crises, we turn to God.

- **Pray for peace**, as Psalm 46:9 declares, You “make wars cease to the ends of the earth.” For those in conflict with one another to come to a peaceful solution, so that civilians may resume their daily lives.
- **Pray for families fleeing the hunger crisis in East Africa**, as 34 million people (including 4 million children) face starvation resulting from famine, recurrent drought and conflict. For those who have been uprooted from their homes, displaced in their own country or are fleeing to neighboring countries for safety. For provision in host communities with the resources to assist families arriving on their doorstep.
- **Pray for Syrian Christian communities.** The Syrian Church goes back to New Testament times. Saul was helped by Christians in Damascus after his encounter with the ascended Christ (Acts 9). These communities today have requested prayer that they may stay strong in faith in the midst of violence and persecution.
- **Pray for World Leaders**, in particular European, American and Canadian government leaders to come to compassionate solutions for refugees in these dire circumstances. For God to open our ears to what the Spirit is saying about our personal involvement in helping meet the overwhelming needs of refugee children and families.