



# WORLD REFUGEE DAY TOOLKIT

Acts of Celebration and Remembrance



# Welcoming Refugees for more than 60 Years

In 2000, the United Nations marked June 20 as World Refugee Day. Since then, this day has been an opportunity to recognize the blessings of refugees in our communities and to educate ourselves about the growing global refugee crisis.

The Office of Social Justice, the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, and World Renew invite you and your congregation to recognize World Refugee Day throughout the month of June. We have put together this toolkit to offer you resources and ideas for celebrating World Refugee Day as congregations and individuals. Whether through Sunday worship, advocating with refugees globally and locally, hosting a community dinner for refugees, or another creative idea, you can actively demonstrate that Christians across North America stand with refugees—fellow image-bearers of Christ.



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# Welcoming Refugees: It's Who We Are

Welcoming refugees has been a faithful response of the Christian Reformed Church for decades. World Renew's first U.S. ministry was to help Cuban refugees arriving in Miami through the Good Samaritan Center. CRC churches across North America joined the ministry through donating food and clothes to support incoming families. Throughout the 1960s, World Renew helped over 25,000 refugees fleeing persecution. To learn more about these stories of the past, read *Being a Good Samaritan to Refugees in Miami* at [tinyurl.com/m3623ut](http://tinyurl.com/m3623ut).

This faithful tradition continues today with people across the United States and Canada opening their congregations and homes to refugees from Burma, Syria, Sudan, Honduras, and beyond. CRC members have seen the face of God in refugees, and they've been forever changed. Here are some stories of members of CRC churches across North America who have resettled refugees in the past few years and in turn have been deeply blessed.

Watch *CRC News* ([crcna.org/news-and-views](http://crcna.org/news-and-views)) and *The Banner* ([thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org)) for more stories of refugee sponsorship in the CRC!



**Refugees Welcome story from Westview CRC  
in Grand Rapids, Michigan:**

“Having Burmese Families in our worship has given us glimpses of heaven. All nations and colors singing and worshipping together. We see the world globally now. Our worship and ministry is larger than just our church and neighborhood. Helping refugees resettle is in the DNA of our congregation now.”

**Refugees Welcome story from Loop Church  
in Chicago, Illinois:**

“As a church, we are cosponsoring a Muslim Syrian refugee family. They are the kindest and most hospitable people. Although we don’t speak the same language, it’s amazing to see the love in the parents’ eyes for their



children. One of the highlights so far of our church's weekly visits was teaching and playing Duck, Duck, Goose with the kids. Both the parents have expressed longing for friendships, for work and school, and for normalcy."

### **Refugees Welcome story from Drayton Christian Reformed Church in Drayton, Ontario:**

"The Muselmani family has been gracious and extremely hospitable, even though the language can be a barrier (though this is changing as their English improves daily). They are quick to offer coffee, homemade cookies,



or a meal if you are at their house even remotely close to dinner time. They have been quick to adopt us as their Canadian family. Though they are safe now here in Canada, it is difficult to comprehend the anxiety and desperation they feel for their family still in Syria and in other refugee camps in Europe. It has made me more aware of the global crisis that is happening and the incredible toll it has taken on so many people, families, and countries.”

**Refugees Welcome story from Woodynook CRC in Alberta:**

“Sponsoring this refugee family has been a blessing to our lives. We are experiencing the fullness of life: together our joys reach higher, our sorrows stretch wider, and our pain touches deeper. Our eyes are open wide as we live into the lives God has given us; as we live our part of God’s bigger story.”

**Visit the [Welcome Refugees](https://www.facebook.com/crcna) album at [facebook.com/crcna](https://www.facebook.com/crcna) to see more inspiring photos and stories of how CRC members across Canada and the United States have been changed through welcoming refugees into their congregations and lives.**

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# Learn and Remember

Who is a refugee? As Christians, when we think about refugees, we are often reminded of the biblical call to “welcome the stranger.” But in this increasingly interconnected world, these “strangers” are becoming our neighbors, and we quickly realize that we need each other. Strangers become friends, family, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we welcome these imagebearers, we remember that refugee resettlement is a life-saving option that is only available to a small number of people fleeing violence and persecution. The overwhelming majority of refugees will never be permanently resettled into a new country. Refugees typically wait in urban centers or refugee camps run by the United Nations until they can return home or are selected for resettlement. While the hope for many is to return to their homeland, many will wait decades and return to an unrecognizable place without many of their family members. Those who are considered for resettlement are among the most vulnerable in the community. Government sponsored refugees and privately sponsored refugees undergo the refugee and resettlement screening process abroad and arrive in their new home with documentation.

**The United Nations Convention of 1951 defines a refugee as a person fleeing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.**

These facts and figures begin to paint a picture of the plight of refugees around the world:



Infographic source: [www.unhcr.org/en-us/us-refugee-resettlement-facts.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/us-refugee-resettlement-facts.html)

**As you try to absorb the scale and significance of the numbers on the previous page, we invite you to pause for a moment.** Remember that each statistic represents individual lives. These are the lives of people whose eyes and faces reveal the story of a pain and suffering we may struggle to understand. Many are brothers and sisters whom we are blessed to now call friends and neighbors. And others are individuals whose names and journeys we will never know. Every last one is an imagebearer of God, in whose likeness we are all made.

In Canada and the United States it also is possible for asylum seekers to seek protection in the country by making either a port-of-entry or inland claim. For more details on this rigorous process see the following websites: (Canada) [www.refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/refugee-claim-flowchart](http://www.refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/refugee-claim-flowchart); (U.S.) [www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states](http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states).

To learn more about refugees and the refugee resettlement process, visit the Office of Social Justice's refugee [resource page](#).



## Build Community

We encourage you to seek out ways to celebrate and remember refugees in recognition of World Refugee Day. Below are just a few ideas for you and your church community to consider.

**Host a Welcome Dinner:** The Bible calls us to practice a deep form of hospitality: *philoxenia*, or love for the stranger. You can practice this value by hosting a meal for recently arrived newcomers and refugees. This meal could take place at your church, at another church you partner with, or at a local community center. The act of inviting recently arrived immigrants, refugees, and



asylum seekers to join you around a common table demonstrates a desire to create a welcoming space, build relationships, and learn from one another. Read Trixie's reflections on her church's welcome dinner on *Do Justice* here: [dojustice.crcna.org/article/becoming-what-we-receive-communion-community](http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/becoming-what-we-receive-communion-community)

**Join with Your Neighbors on World Refugee Day:**

Contact local newcomer-serving organizations to learn about World Refugee Day. Invite friends, family, and members of your church to volunteer at or attend the event with you. This is a great way to meet new people and stand in solidarity with others who desire to be part of a community that both welcomes and befriends the stranger.

**Hold a Prayer Service or Vigil:** The statistics listed earlier do not fully capture the pain, heartbreak, and suffering faced by people around the world who are forced to leave their homes. As we celebrate the ways in which we are able to offer welcome, we mourn the millions of lives around the world that are torn apart by persecution, violence, and fear. We encourage you and your church to consider hosting a prayer service to remember the plight of refugees, to pray for protection and comfort, and to ask for a transformation of hearts to be open to welcome. In the *Worship* section of this resource, you will find a variety of themes and ideas to build from as you plan your service.



## Worship

We don't have to dig deep in Scripture to find God's call to welcome the stranger—from warnings that the way that we treat foreigners reveals the state of our relationship with God (Mal. 3:5), to the call to practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), to God's oft-repeated refrain to the Israelites: "Love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). Jesus even said that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome him (Matt. 25:40)! Jesus himself was a refugee who escaped with his family from the violence of King Herod for the unfamiliar landscape of Egypt (Matt. 2:13). Because we seek the heart of God, we too have a heart for refugees and recognize our call to walk with them in advocacy, justice, and welcome.

**World Refugee Day is a fitting opportunity to highlight these biblical themes in your worship service or family devotions. Our call to do justice flows out of our relationship with God!**

## Sunday school idea

*Welcome cards* (Activity 2) (World Evangelicals)

This activity prompts kids to take a step to welcome refugees by writing a card that can be sent either to the government as an advocacy action or to a local organization that welcomes refugees.

[tinyurl.com/mnfuaj8](https://tinyurl.com/mnfuaj8)

## Children's message idea

Learning about *refugee stories at Sunday school*  
(from the CRC's *Journey with Me* toolkit)

There are four lessons here, all based on stories or children's books about refugee realities.

[tinyurl.com/l78wvl7](https://tinyurl.com/l78wvl7)

## Prayers

*Prayer for Refugees* (World Renew)

This prayer builds on the song "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." It was developed for use with regard to the Syrian refugee crisis but can easily be adapted to highlight other refugee situations as well.

[tinyurl.com/le2buc5](https://tinyurl.com/le2buc5)

*Refugees' Litany of Lament and Hope* (World Renew):

This powerful prayer imagines life in a refugee camp and demonstrates the tension between despair and hope in a vivid way.

[tinyurl.com/kjgqnym](https://tinyurl.com/kjgqnym)

## Resources for preaching

*Scripture passages and sermon examples*

(from the CRC's *Journey with Me* toolkit)

This PDF includes dozens of Scripture references, as well as three sermons about refugees or immigrants that have been preached in Christian Reformed churches in either Canada or the United States.

[tinyurl.com/mlmbezj](https://tinyurl.com/mlmbezj)

## Songs

*Songs, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*

(from the CRC's *Journey with Me* toolkit)

These 14 songs that relate to the call to welcome the stranger are drawn from the *Lift Up Your Hearts* hymnal and can also be found in other common song collections.

[tinyurl.com/lxfs5u](https://tinyurl.com/lxfs5u)

## Creative element

*“God’s Eye Is on the Refugee” skit (Reformed Worship)*

This creative and easy-to-use skit helps a congregation to imagine different stages of refugees’ journeys and invites them into deeper empathy and reflection.

[tinyurl.com/lcq8a7b](https://tinyurl.com/lcq8a7b)

## Find more worship resources at . . .

[crcna.org/JourneyWithMe](https://crcna.org/JourneyWithMe)

[crcna.org/publicdialogue/resources/refugee-justice-worship-resources](https://crcna.org/publicdialogue/resources/refugee-justice-worship-resources)

[network.crcna.org/social-justice/worship-resources-and-prayers-refugees-and-immigrants](https://network.crcna.org/social-justice/worship-resources-and-prayers-refugees-and-immigrants)





## Speak Out

We are witnessing the greatest displacement of people in recent history — the most recent statistics available put the number at more than 65 million. This number is staggering and incomprehensible, but we must remember that each individual seeking refuge is made in the image of God. **As Christians, we have a unique opportunity to speak into this moment because of our biblical call to welcome the stranger and defend the cause of the most vulnerable.**

Part of an elected official's job is to listen to constituents — that's you! Because of this, we have the opportunity to be in regular contact with our members of Congress and Parliament to ensure they know that Christians across North America welcome refugees in our communities. Take action!

### Canada

**Support Refugees: Call for a Review of the Safe Third Country Agreement!**

Did you know that Canada and the United States have an agreement that requires refugees to request refugee

protection in the first safe country they reach? Because the U.S. is designated as a “safe third country” under the Safe Third Country Agreement, refugees who arrive first in the U.S. must request protection there, unless they qualify for an exception to the Agreement. However, this agreement has not been updated in years, and many refugee advocates say it is forcing already vulnerable asylum seekers to make their crossing in risky ways, if they feel that they are no longer safe in the United States.

**It is time to carefully review the effectiveness of the Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the U.S. to make sure that the agreement does not endanger vulnerable migrants seeking a safe haven.**

Advocate for a review of the agreement here: [p2a.co/orPsxET](https://p2a.co/orPsxET)

## **United States**

### **Tell Congress to Support Refugee Resettlement!**

When we welcome refugees, we catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God. We can only continue the kingdom work of resettling refugees with a strong resettlement program. Demonstrating your support for refugees will empower legislatures to speak up for refugee resettlement, a life-saving program that defines us as Americans and allows us to follow our call as Christians.

It’s critical that our resettlement program remains strong and equitable and that we continue to welcome an appropriate number of refugees from every country.

**Take action!** Text the word *refugee* to the number 52886 to send a message, or make a phone call to your elected officials! You can also take action online here: [p2a.co/3lbIvES](https://p2a.co/3lbIvES)

# Get Involved in Resettlement

Whether you live in the United States or Canada, you and your church can play an active role in welcoming refugees and walking alongside them as they settle in your community.

## United States

The CRC in the U.S. is part of an extremely efficient and effective public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of State and non-profit agencies and churches in communities all around the U.S. The CRC is assigned refugee families by Church World Service, one of nine national-level refugee resettlement agencies approved to work with the Department of State.

Refugee families come to local churches through the Church World Service affiliate agency in their area.

For instance, in West Michigan the Church World Service's local affiliate is Bethany Christian Services. Bethany is the agency that recruits churches, assigns refugee families, and supervises arrivals and care of refugee families with local congregations. In addition to providing resettlement services in West Michigan, Bethany also helps CRC churches from other regions in the U.S. make the important decision to sponsor a family. They can then connect the church with local refugee resettlement agencies.

If your church is interested in learning more about how your congregation or group can support refugees in the United States, visit Bethany Christian Services ([www.bethany.org](http://www.bethany.org)) or call (616) 224-7540 for more information.

## Canada

For the CRC in Canada, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) presents a unique opportunity to play a meaningful role in the welcome and integration of refugees in Canada. The program, administered by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, allows sponsors to apply to resettle refugees who are approved overseas for protection. After refugees arrive in Canada, the sponsor provides intensive personal settlement support, such as assisting the refugees to find appropriate medical services, apply for necessary documents, open a bank account, and learn how to use public transportation. Since its beginning in 1979 the program has allowed Canadians to offer protection and a new home to more than 275,000 refugees.

Having signed an agreement with the minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, World Renew is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) in Canada. This allows World Renew to approve churches and groups who wish to sponsor refugees under its agreement. Privately sponsored refugees arrive in Canada as permanent residents and must settle in the same community as their sponsor. If your church is interested in learning more about refugee sponsorship in Canada through World Renew, please call 1-800-730-3490 or visit [worldrenew.net/sponsor-refugees-canada](http://worldrenew.net/sponsor-refugees-canada).

# Give

**If you're scheduling an offering this month, please consider the Office of Social Justice's offering Sunday (June 11).**

Along with several other CRC ministries, OSJ provides resources to support congregations as they follow the biblical call to welcome the stranger and do justice. Check out [justice.crcna.org/refugees](https://justice.crcna.org/refugees) to find more resources, ways to get involved, and synodical statements. In the U.S., OSJ also supports the work of Bethany Christian Services as they help churches resettle refugees. In Canada, this work is done through World Renew's *Refugee Office*.

You can also find a litany, prayer, and powerpoint for your worship service on the OSJ website at [justice.crcna.org/offering-sunday](https://justice.crcna.org/offering-sunday).



