



Image by Guillermo Rangel

WORLD REFUGEE DAY TOOLKIT

Acts of Celebration and Remembrance



Welcoming Refugees for more than 60 Years

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

We live in a world where the potential for connectedness and mutual understanding is unprecedented. Yet, suspicion and fear of the other dominate the headlines, and the number of forced displacements around the world continues to climb. **How are we as the Church—the body of Christ—to respond?**

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. **It is our prayer that this toolkit furthers the already faithful work of the Christian Reformed Church in welcoming refugees—**fellow image-bearers of Christ. Our churches and our faith are stronger because of this work.

In this toolkit, you will find resources and ideas for celebrating World Refugee Day both as congregations and individuals. Whether you participate through worship, acts of advocacy, building community, or drawing on your own creative ideas, you can actively demonstrate that Christians across North America stand with refugees.

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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.

Throughout the 1960s, World Renew helped over 25,000 refugees fleeing persecution. World Renew's first U.S. ministry was to help Cuban refugees arriving in Miami through the Good Samaritan Center.

In the Canadian context, World Renew began its official refugee work after signing its first Sponsorship Agreement with the Canadian government in 1979. At this time, the CRC welcomed thousands of Vietnamese refugees to Canada. **World Renew is celebrating the 40th anniversary of this formal sponsorship work in Canada in 2019!** These examples of refugee resettlement work, as well as other early, informal acts of involvement, led CRC churches across North America to join the refugee ministry through donating food, household items, and financial support to incoming families.

To learn more about these stories, read *Being a Good Samaritan to Refugees in Miami* (worldrenew.net/about-us/news-events/being-good-samaritan-refugees-miami) and *Running on Empty: Canada and the Indochinese Refugees, 1975-1980* by Michael J. Molloy, Peter Duschinsky, and Kurt F. Jensen.



The CRC's ministry of resettlement has continued ever since. Through World Renew, CRC members in Canada have welcomed refugees from all over the world, including Cambodians fleeing the Khmer Rouge in the 1980s, and Karen refugees fleeing Thailand in the early 2000s. Similar waves of refugee resettlement have also taken place through Christian Reformed churches in the United States through a partnership between the Office of Social Justice and Bethany Christian Services.

Today, congregations across the United States and Canada have opened their churches and homes to refugees from Burma, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, and beyond. **In this ministry work, CRC members have seen the face of God in refugees** and have been forever changed. In the following pages, we'll share just a few of the many stories of CRC church members across North America who have resettled refugees recently.

For more stories about the involvement of CRC congregations in refugee justice work, access the following links:

Panelists Urge Ongoing Help for Refugees

(CRC News) www.crcna.org/news-and-views/panelists-urge-ongoing-help-refugees

Art Tells Stories of Refugees in British Columbia

(The Banner) www.thebanner.org/news/2017/09/art-tells-stories-of-refugees-in-british-columbia

The Church and the Refugee Crisis: Finding Our Way Home Together (Christian Courier)

www.christiancourier.ca/news/entry/the-church-and-the-refugee-crisis-finding-our-way-home-together

Refugees Welcome story from Oakland CRC in Hamilton, Michigan:

A week or so before Easter, Oakland CRC, a rural church in West Michigan, welcomed an extended family of 10 Congolese refugees who had been living in a Burundi refugee camp. Pastor Swierenga reflects on the experience, calling refugee resettlement work a beautiful, “God-sized” challenge: “I can’t even begin to explain all the things that needed to come together for this to happen, but they have—and they continue to come together. We have seen that God is alive and at work and has invited us in to join in doing a work that is bigger than us.”

Refugee Resettlement: A Beautiful God-sized

Challenge (CRC News) www.crcna.org/news-and-views/refugee-resettlement-beautiful-god-sized-challenge



Refugees Welcome story from British Columbia churches:

Through their established partnership with the Immigrant Services Society (ISS) of B.C., CRC churches in B.C. offer a ministry of presence to refugees staying in the transitional housing of ISS' Welcome Centre. In fall of 2016, the classis created a specific position to further their ministry with refugees: a refugee chaplain and community mobilizer position. Dena Nicolai, the chaplain appointed to this position, hopes that her position and the close partnership with the ISS of B.C will benefit refugees. It is her prayer that the presence of Christ be felt by those passing through the Welcome Centre as the church provides "the relational and community support that is so needed for [the] true welcome and integration of newcomers into Canadian society."

www.thebanner.org/news/2016/04/british-columbia-churches-provide-chaplain-for-refugees



Refugees Welcome story from CRC members in Grand Rapids, Michigan:

On January 26, 2017, members of the Christian Reformed Church joined an advocacy event as a way to respond to President Trump's executive orders to halt the U.S. refugee program. In this gathering, over 250 members of the Grand Rapids community stood in solidarity with refugees, declaring that they are indeed welcome.

Peter Vander Meulen, former coordinator of the CRC's Office of Social Justice, affirmed the CRC's involvement in these events. "A policy like this one is a devastating blow to the infrastructure of our crucial resettlement programs, and it's also just morally wrong. I hope the CRC speaks—loudly—against this policy which so directly works against our unique and historic call in this denomination," he said.

CRC Joins With Others in Support of Refugees
(CRC News) www.crcna.org/news-and-views/crc-joins-others-support-refugees

**Refugees Welcome story from CRC members
in Canada:**

Given the increasingly difficult environment for refugees in the United States, many refugees are searching for a way to come to Canada. However, even if there are well-founded threats to the refugee's protection and safety within the United States, the Safe Third Country Agreement requires that refugees entering Canada from the U.S. at an official point of entry must be turned back to the United States, the country where they first sought asylum. That's why many refugee groups argue that the Safe Third Country Agreement further endangers vulnerable people and are calling for a review of the Safe Third Country Agreement. In order to reach safety, asylum seekers sometimes enter Canada outside of regular points of entry in order to avoid being turned back—a choice that is legal if their claims are approved, but risky.

Mike Hogeterp, director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, notes that the Safe Third Country Agreement presents significant challenges to the safety of refugees seeking to come from the United States to Canada. "We see merit in the legal challenge to evaluate the concerns that these refugees bring with them when they arrive in this country," he said.



CRC Keeps Close Eye on Lawsuit Involving Safety of Refugees (CRC News) www.crcna.org/news-and-views/crc-keeps-close-eye-lawsuit-involving-safety-refugees

Refugees Welcome story from Loop Church in Chicago, Illinois:

“For our church, becoming friends with a Syrian refugee family personalized the challenges refugees face and drove us to share some of what we had learned with friends, family, and eventually our government representatives. We chose to speak out,” explained Anne Fennema, a member of Loop Church.

Welcoming Refugees: From Compassion to Action in 4 Steps (Do Justice) dojustice.crcna.org/article/welcoming-refugees-compassion-action-4-steps

Refugees Welcome story from Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingston, Ontario:

Members of Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingston, Ontario, recently sponsored a refugee family from Eritrea. This sponsorship and the corresponding relationships have deeply impacted all those involved. Heidi De Jonge, pastor of Westside Fellowship, expressed her thoughts on the situation, “I am so thankful that this family came to us, because we weren’t going to quit. I am proud of the committee and the church. We’ve grown as a committee and individually and it has impacted our lives.”

Eritrean Family Settles In (The Whig) www.thewhig.com/2015/10/30/eritrean-family-settles-in

Visit the [Welcome Refugees](#) 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.

Learn and Remember

Who is a refugee? 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.

Refugees come to North America in a variety of ways: as a refugee claimant (also referred to as an asylum seeker), government sponsored refugee, or privately sponsored refugee (Canada).

Though the overwhelming majority of refugees will never be permanently resettled into a new country, some individuals may come to the host country through the sponsorship of the government or, in Canada's case, a private organization or group. While the hope for many is to return to their homeland, many will wait decades. They may eventually return, but home may have become unrecognizable and family members may have been lost along the way. Refugees typically wait in urban centers or refugee camps run by the United Nations until they can return home or are selected for resettlement. Those who are considered for resettlement are among the most vulnerable members of their community. Government sponsored refugees and privately sponsored refugees (Canada) undergo the refugee and resettlement screening process abroad and arrive in their new home with documentation.

Global Resettlement by the Numbers

Less than **1%** of the world's refugees are ever resettled.

More than **30** countries around the world currently accept refugees for resettlement.

8% of the global refugee population is in need of resettlement.

28,300 people a day are forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.

51% of refugees are children.

189,300 refugees were resettled in 2016

There are more than **22.5 million** refugees in the world.

Nearly **56%** of the world's displaced people are hosted in the Middle East and Africa.

55% of refugees worldwide came from 3 countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan.

Top host countries include:
1. Turkey (2.9 mil)
2. Pakistan (1.4 mil)
3. Lebanon (1.0 mil)

Infographic source: www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

In Canada and the United States, it is also possible for individuals to arrive in the host country and make either a port-of-entry or inland asylum claim. For more details on this rigorous process see the following websites:

refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/refugee-claim-flowchart (Canada);

www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states (U.S.).

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

- 51 percent of refugees are children.
- 84 percent of refugees are hosted by developing regions.
- The resettlement of refugees worldwide increased by 77 percent between the years 2015 and 2016.

As you try to absorb the scale and significance of the numbers above, we invite you to pause for a moment. Remember that each statistic represents real peoples' lives. Though we may struggle to understand these experiences fully, these individuals hold stories of deep pain and suffering.

We are blessed to now call many refugees our friends and neighbors. However, we recognize that there are some individuals whose names and journeys we will never know. Even so, we know that each of these individuals remain a unique image-bearer of God, in whose likeness we are all made.

To learn more about refugees and the refugee resettlement process, visit the Office of Social Justice's refugee [resource page \(justice.crcna.org/refugee-resources\)](http://justice.crcna.org/refugee-resources) or the [World Renew Refugee page \(worldrenew.net/refugees\)](http://worldrenew.net/refugees).

Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, and Refugee Claimants

Who Are They and What's the Difference?

As news has circulated about “migrant caravans” coming to the U.S. southern border, or “illegal border crossings” into Canada, there has been a lot of confusion about:

- whether those arriving are doing so “legally,” and
- the difference between asylum-seekers (also known as refugee claimants in Canada) and refugees.

To faithfully and lovingly respond to our refugee and asylum-seeking neighbors at this time, we must be truth-tellers.

It is legal to seek asylum. Under both U.S. and Canadian law, people who enter the country—whether at a port of entry or elsewhere—have a legal right to request asylum if they fear persecution in their home country. They do not need to have papers (be “documented”) to exercise this right.

The grounds for receiving asylum and refugee status are the same: *a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.*

A **refugee** has already gone through the rigorous process of vetting and background checks prior to arriving to the U.S. or Canada—their claim has already been decided. An **asylum-seeker** shows up to the U.S. border and then goes through the process—their claim has yet to be decided. In Canada, asylum-seekers are called **refugee claimants**, but the distinction is the same.

Find more information about the situation in Canada:
crcna.org/CanadaRefugeeFacts

Sources: *Amnesty International, Habitat For Humanity, NPR*



Build Community

We encourage you to seek out ways to celebrate and remember refugees this World Refugee Day, and during the whole month of June. We have included a few ideas for you and your church community to consider. Maybe one of these ideas will spark your own ideas too!

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

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.

Partner with Local Settlement Service Agencies:

Reach out to local settlement service agencies as a way to further support refugees already in the United States or Canada. Through this partnership, your congregations will gain a heightened awareness of the current policy challenges and settlement needs of refugees in your area.

For further reflections on this form of partnership, visit dojustice.crcna.org/article/church-community-visionaries



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 to 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.

www.worldevangelicals.org/refugeecrisis/pdf/WelcomeCardSundaySchoolLesson.pdf

Youth group idea

It can be hard to imagine what refugees have gone through. World Renew has put together a kit to help you set up a simulated refugee camp in your church and walk for a moment in refugees' shoes. Contact Peter Bulthuis at pbulthuis@worldrenew.net about borrowing the kit for your youth group.



Children's message idea

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

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

www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/learning_about_refugee_stories_at_sunday_school.pdf

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.

worldrenew.net/pray-refugees

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.

worldrenew.net/sites/default/files/Litany%20of%20Lament%20and%20Hope.pdf

Immigrants are a Blessing Litany (Office of Social Justice)

This prayer of thanksgiving emphasizes that immigrants are a blessing and so, together, we give thanks.

justice.crcna.org/immigrants-are-blessing-litany

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.

www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/scripture_passages_and_sermon_examples.pdf

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.

www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/psalms_hymns_and_spiritual_songs.pdf

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.

www.reformedworship.org/article/december-2007/gods-eye-refugee

Refugee Sunday

Although there is a specific day in April designated “Refugee Sunday” in Canada, the material intended for this day can be used during any worship service throughout the year. On Refugee Sunday, we reflect on the work of churches across Canada in welcoming refugees and supporting them throughout their settlement process. The prayers and financial support offered during this service will further the CRC’s involvement in refugee ministry.

World Renew has made the following resources available to guide your church as you plan for your Refugee Sunday service:

worldrenew.net/refugeesponsorship

Find more worship resources at . . .

crcna.org/JourneyWithMe

crcna.org/publicdialogue/resources/refugee-justice-worship-resources

network.crcna.org/social-justice/worship-resources-and-prayers-refugees-and-immigrants

Speak Out

In following Christ's call to welcome the stranger, we must begin by acknowledging the significant role of the government in welcoming refugees in both Canada and the U.S. For example, government policies dictate the number of refugees granted entry into each country. Christian citizens have the ability to participate in the legislative process by advocating for laws that reflect justice and hospitality. Such participation flows from *philoxenia* (love of the stranger), a love to which we are called. **Therefore, as Christians, we have a unique opportunity to welcome the stranger and defend the cause of the vulnerable.**

It is the job of each elected official to listen to constituents—that's you! We have the opportunity to regularly communicate with our members of Congress and Parliament to demonstrate that Christians across North America remain committed to the work of hospitality within our communities.

These days, laws and policies affecting refugees are changing frequently. If you'd like to practice biblical advocacy and stay in the loop on current advocacy opportunities, let us know at justice.crcna.org/action-center.

Get Involved in Resettlement

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

Canada

For members of the CRC in Canada, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) presents an incredible opportunity to play a meaningful role in the welcome and integration of refugees. The program, unique to Canada and administered by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), allows individuals and churches to apply to sponsor refugees. Refugees can be referred to churches by people within Canada who have a connection to a refugee family in asylum overseas or by IRCC. As a Sponsorship Agreement Holder organization with a signed agreement with IRCC to resettle refugees, World Renew can approve churches and groups who wish to sponsor refugees under its agreement. After refugees arrive in Canada, sponsors provide intensive personal settlement support in areas such as transportation, housing, banking, and health care. Since its establishment in 1979, the program has given Canadians the opportunity to formally support more than 275,000 refugees.

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/refugeesponsorship.

United States

The CRC in the U.S. is part of a system of efficient and effective public-private partnerships between the U.S. Department of State, non-profit agencies, and churches in communities all across the country.

The State Department brings refugees to the U.S. through government-approved refugee resettlement agencies that have local affiliate agencies which directly assist refugees from the moment they arrive in their new cities. Refugee families get connected with CRC churches through the local agencies to help them adjust and integrate into their new communities.

In West Michigan, Bethany Christian Services is one of these local agencies that recruits churches, assigns refugee families, and supervises their relationship. In other regions of the U.S., Bethany serves as the liaison between a willing refugee-sponsor church and the local refugee resettlement agency.

If your church is interested in learning more about how to sponsor refugees in the U.S., visit Bethany Christian Services (www.bethany.org) or call (616) 224-7540 for more information.

Give

There are several ministries in the Christian Reformed Church that work closely together to welcome, advocate with, and support refugees. Please remember them in your personal and congregational giving!

If you'd like to support these ministries, you can give on their designated giving Sunday or donate through their websites.

Office of Social Justice (OSJ Sunday)

justice.crcna.org/offering

Centre for Public Dialogue (Justice and Hope Sunday)

crcna.org/publicdialogue/resources/justice-and-hope-sunday

World Renew (Refugee Sunday)

worldrenew.net/refugeesponsorship

