

Building Bridges...



Refugee Sunday is an exciting celebration of churches walking alongside refugees coming to Canada with the dream of a fresh start. This material is designed to help lead your congregation through Refugee Sunday. Or, if you are participating at home, you can reflect and pray as you read through these resources. Please share with your family and friends!

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Sponsoring refugees means the church can be relevant and be a community that embraces people who have lost everything and give them a new start. I'm most proud of signing the documents that brought the Tangs and Phannarahs to us. I am also proud of how our faith community reached out to them over the many years and brought in more families. I'm proud that when we ask for resources, be it furniture or money, the congregation [responds] generously."

Rick DeGraaf, Cambridge Maranatha CRC

A History of Compassion

In the late 1970's Christian communities were compelled to act in response to the perils faced by the refugees from Southeast Asia. World Renew felt that getting involved in sponsoring refugees and helping them resettle in Canada was a tangible way the church could make a difference.

Many church members, immigrants themselves, remember the displacement of war and the loss of their home and their birth country. Since signing the inaugural sponsorship agreement with the Government of Canada in 1979, Christian Reformed Churches from coast to coast have welcomed and walked alongside over 10,500 refugees as they sought peace in a new country.

Rev. Arie Van Eek, signatory to the first agreement says: *"Sponsorship works. Christians experiencing and living in freedom in Christ should have the energy and desire to help."* Roy Berkenbosch, former director of the Micah Centre at King's University College, says: *"Regardless of their place of origin, ethnicity, religious tradition or any other humanly contrived way to mark them as 'other,' refugees are children of the Creator God...That makes each of them a sister and a brother."*

Your church may already have experienced the joy of welcoming a refugee family into your community. If not, we invite you to celebrate the strength of the church, and the compassion of Christian sisters and brothers as they reach out and welcome refugees into homes, communities, and hearts.

In the next 2 seconds someone will be forced out of their home.

Here are just a few statistics to help you understand the breadth of the refugee experience:

- 79.5 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced. 26 million of these people are refugees. 45.7 million remain in their own country, but have lost their homes. 4.2 million are seeking asylum, living in uncertainty while they wait for refugee status.
- Developing countries host more than 80% of the world's refugees.
- 1.4 million vulnerable refugees urgently need resettlement. Less than 5% were resettled.
- Resettlement is a life-saving measure for those at risk and in need of protection.

As you are planning your Refugee Sunday Service, consider using the following Scripture to underline Jesus' teaching. As followers of Christ our first response to our neighbours who are suffering is mercy.

Focus on God's Word:

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'"

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."





Litany for Refugee Sunday

O God, our help in ages past, it was you who led the Israelites through the wilderness, a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

We pray that you will guide the vulnerable migrants who today search out new hope and new life.

As they search for a way out,
as they board ships and trucks and cross fences,
as they carry children and walk for miles,
protect them, Lord.

**Our hope for years to come,
you create all people to flourish
to live in safety, to find meaning, to experience love, to seek after you.**

We pray for those who have lost hope, safety, love, and faith.
We pray for parents whose children have been lost or have died.
We pray for children who are going without food, water, and safety.
We pray for communities abandoned and for communities overwhelmed.
Oh God, bring miraculous and life-giving hope.

**Our shelter from the stormy blast,
you are the one who brings peace.**

You are our mother hen, protecting us under your wings.

We pray for an end to the tyranny and global violence.
Protect those who haven't yet found a way to leave.
We pray for the hearts of those who persecute others.
We pray for the eyes of the world to turn to the needs of those most vulnerable.
Give wisdom to the leaders who must choose how to facilitate peace.

**Our eternal home,
in you we find abundant life,
for this life and for the next.**

For those who have lost everything, we pray you will rebuild their lives.
For those desperate for a new home, open the doors to safer places.
For those longing for the basic necessities of life, restore their material goods.
For those whose communities and families have been ripped apart, strengthen new bonds of friendship.
And for the church, near and far, which worships in safety today — inspire us to welcome our neighbours.
Help us to discern how to reach out to refugees in acts of mercy and to seek justice for refugees for long-term hope.
Amen





A Prayer for Refugees

God of Grace,

Watch over the men, women and children who have been forced to flee from their homes.

Guide them as they search for a safe place to settle, for peace and for opportunity.

God of Mercy,

Be with them as they flee

Lead them into a safe place

Protect them from danger

Embrace them in their fears, pain and loneliness.

God of Creation

Let us see your image reflected in the face of each refugee

Let them see your image reflected in our faces as we open our homes and welcome them into our community.

May we stretch out our arms to them.

May they find their home in our midst.

Amen





Rima's story is a true story of a recent refugee. Use her story as a special children's feature or in your children's program to help children understand how a refugee child might feel about having to flee from their home and find a new place to live with their family. Tell the class that one of the most important parts of Rima's story is that families in Canada welcomed her and her family to their new home.

A Children's Story

I want to tell you a story of a little girl named Rima. Rima is just 10 years old. When she was 8 she moved to Canada. The trip took all day and all night. The plane was crowded and hot and it stopped 2 times.

She doesn't remember everything, but she remembers a garden with fat grapes, long cucumbers and bright red tomatoes.

One night, when she was still little, she woke up from the sound of bombs and missiles so close to the house she could smell the gun powder. Her mother cried all the time. She told Rima that she needed to watch her little brother very carefully and to stay as close to the house as possible. A few weeks later, when the night was as black as it could be, a large missile hit the house. Her father and oldest brother were killed. Now there was just her mother, her sister and her little brother.

Her mother didn't know what to do. When Rima's uncle talked about taking his family out of the country to a camp, her mother decided she would go with him. She told Rima to take her backpack and choose 3 outfits and 7 pairs of underwear and 1 toy. When Rima looked at all her stuffed animals and dolls, she wanted to take them all. But there was no room in her backpack. She decided to take Amira—her very favourite doll. Amira means princess and Rima loved princesses!

The camp wasn't at all what Rima expected. It was dirty and hot. Then it was dirty and cold. She wished for the fat grapes that grew in her garden at home. She dreamt about a little bag of pistachios, just like the one her dad would bring from the market. But she didn't complain because everyone was having a hard time and food was precious.

Then one day a flurry of excitement rippled their tent. They were accepted to go to Canada! What a funny name, Rima thought. She wondered what it would be like.

The whole way to Canada, in the taxi, on the plane, in the airport, Rima hung on to Amira. Amira was very, very dirty and her pretty pink dress was ripped in some places, but she was Rima's best friend.

Canada surprised Rima!

She had never, ever seen snow! Imagine how it felt when she walked out of the airport and felt the cold winter wind!

And everyone was using strange words. Rima spoke Arabic. She didn't know what anyone was saying.

Now Rima has lived in Canada for 3 years. She has learned English, and to swim and to skate. She loves to skate and winter doesn't feel as cold.