

What we can do to be... **Welcoming the Stranger**



A boat carrying migrant workers and Libyans from Tripoli arrives at the Lampedusa port escorted by the coastguard © Kate Thomas/IRIN

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Introduction

Britain has a long history of welcoming refugees to this country. From the Protestant Christians who fled mainland Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, to the Jewish refugees escaping pogroms, poverty and persecution at the end of the 19th century; from people escaping from across Europe fleeing Nazi persecution during the 2nd World War, to those at risk of ethnic cleansing and political oppression fleeing to our shores more recently. Where persecution, injustice and oppression are daily realities, escape to another country becomes the only option.

The first edition of *Welcoming the Stranger* was published in 2000 in response to a debate at the Baptist Assembly in 1999 when it was resolved that work should be done to 'help the Baptist community understand and respond to the challenge to welcome the stranger'. It was designed to help Baptists and other Christians recognise our calling in Christ to offer hospitality to those who come to this country as refugees, and to offer practical guidance for involvement with those who need our care.

Recent events surrounding the refugee crisis across Europe have affected us all in many ways; it has been heartbreaking to see and hear some of the images and stories that have emerged. We are aware of, and inspired by, Baptist churches who have been working with refugees for many years and rejoice with them as they witness lives being changed through the good news of Jesus Christ. These examples of radical discipleship are an inspiration to us all.

This new, updated and abridged edition of *Welcoming the Stranger*, contains material that will help all of us to engage theologically and practically with the plight of refugees. As we use this resource, let us continue to pray for a just and lasting outcome to this emerging crisis and an end to those acts of inhumanity that account for much of its cause.

Lynn Green
General Secretary

The World We Live In

This is a misnamed crisis; it is not a migrant crisis, it is a refugee crisis that will not be fixed in the short term. This is because its causes are complex and multilayered.

While the causes of displacement have not changed – conflict, persecution, racism, poverty, natural disasters – the rise in numbers has been dramatic. The number of people living exiled from their homes has more than doubled in the last decade to more than 59 million – with 8 million people being added to this number over the past year. The world's state of increasing insecurity and instability is driving some 42,500 people to leave their homes every day in search for security and safety. Fighting in Syria and Iraq, and the rise of Islamic State, has already seen 15 million people driven to seek safety in foreign lands. If they were a nation, the population of displaced and dispossessed people would be the 24th largest country in the world. It would also be a young nation as more than half of all refugees today are under the age of 18.

As churches, we need to face up to this refugee crisis. Erecting walls, fences and barriers rather than addressing what Angela Merkel has called 'the defining issue of our times' will not address the deep seated causes or provide a genuine welcome to the stranger.

Wale Hudson-Roberts

Faith and Society Facilitator: Justice

Telling Stories

Perhaps the stories we most need to hear are the ones told by the refugees themselves. Behind the numbers and the headlines are individuals - each one made in God's image and each one with a story to tell. Listen to them. The names and details may have been changed to offer protection.

- 1 Mrs S became a Christian three years ago after she arrived in the UK from Iran. Her husband is a Muslim; his application for political asylum has been rejected. The Judge did not believe that she was a Christian. He accused her pastor, a leader of an Arabic church, of bias towards her. He is an Iraqi Christian. Mrs S would suffer persecution if she returned to Iran. Her friends and relatives do not accept conversion. She would be subject to physical abuse and unemployed if she returned to Iran.
- 2 The case of Abdul Rahman was widely reported in the UK. The Afghan man has converted to Christianity from Islam and was sentenced to death after being found guilty of apostasy in Kabul. He was eventually granted asylum in Italy where he now lives.

The Operational Guidance Note on Afghanistan advises that applicants are not granted asylum in the UK on these grounds, due to a lack of information about the treatment of apostates in Afghanistan owing to converts keeping a low profile when in the country, and the lack of evidence of direct persecution. It does admit that in some circumstances, where there is evidence of the prospect of persecution, asylum may be granted.

- 3 Due to Master X's involvement in protests against the government of Ethiopia, he was forced to flee for his life. In order to leave the country Master X gave a substantial sum of money to a person who promised to smuggle him out of the country. After many months of travel, Master X found himself in the UK. The Social Services do not know his exact age; they estimate between 13-16 years of age. He is presently living with a foster family in the West Midlands.
- 4 'I have no hope now.'
I am seventeen and a half. I come from Kosovo. At the moment it's terrible back home. It's war. They have massacred so many women and children. I had to leave because they tortured my father in law. He begged me to save my daughter. I didn't have anything to pack because they burnt our house down. I had to borrow some clothes to start the journey. We travelled for 6 days. It was terrible being in the lorry. It was very cold. My husband is dead. He stepped on a landmine. I received the news by fax. I lost all hope. I have no hope now.



© Kate Thomas/IRIN

5 'Handcuffed me ... and beat me'
I came to Britain from Pristina when I was 17. My mother was sacked from her university job and sentenced to 2 years in prison for refusing to accept the new curriculum. She went to hide in another town. The police arrested me. I was scared. They handcuffed me to a chair and beat me with their truncheons in front of my father. Then they beat my father in front of me. My father is still in the former Yugoslavia. I haven't heard from him for three months so I don't know whether he is alive.

6 Living with your worst nightmares
Sulikha is a mother of four young children. She came to England from Somalia in July 1997 because of the Civil War in that country, having been gang raped by soldiers. As her husband attempted to defend her, he was shot dead. Her children stood and witnessed all that happened. Desperate to find a place of safety she sold all she had to pay for her escape and then began to walk. All she wanted to do was get out of Somalia.

The 'agent' who brought her to England did not declare at the airport that she was seeking asylum and this has caused innumerable problems. For the last two years Sulikha has been living in bed and breakfast in a grubby hotel in South London. The accommodation offers no privacy, is poorly furnished, and offers no place for the children to play. As she has children, she receives cash benefit from Social Services, and somehow survives on this meagre sum. She is fortunate enough to have a work permit, but any jobs she gets are poorly paid and affect the benefits received.

**" Sometimes we wonder
about our children - will they
ever get a proper education?
Is there a future for them
besides refugee camps?"**

Refugee parents

Despite help from the Medical Foundation, the children continue to suffer nightmares and she is up many nights trying to comfort them. They are struggling at school. Added to all this, until a decision is made by the Home Office, Sulikha's future and that of her children continue to hang on a thread.

7 ' ... You could hear the screams...'
I escaped from East Africa. The soldiers were abducting young boys and girls. The girls were all gang raped, some of them died. I have been arrested twice. The first time I was detained for a day. They believed I was a soldier; I couldn't convince them otherwise. I was beaten up. The second arrest prompted me to get out of the country. Where I was confined you could hear the screams of people being tortured. We saw people being butchered. From that time I can't eat meat. I got out through bribery. I miss home a lot. I just want to go and see my mum.

8 We can make a difference
I am from Zaire and on 13 March 1993 I arrived in the UK. I sought asylum at the airport and was taken to a detention centre. I remained in detention for 16 months. I knew no one in the UK and I was very alone. Letters and visits from local Christians were a lifeline to me. Their support has sustained my faith.

A delegation of church leaders visited the minister at the Home Office in June 1994 and he made a specific request that I be released from detention pending the outcome of my application for asylum. It was as a result of this intervention that I was released shortly afterwards. I found a room in a house in East London and joined the fellowship of the local Church of which I am now a member.



In October 1995 after 13 visits to court, and numerous adjournments, my appeal was finally heard and I was granted full refugee status. I am now studying law.

I believe the fellowship of this church has put the words of Jesus into practice: 'Come ye who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For ... I was a stranger and you invited me in ... I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

- 9 ' ... There is nowhere safe for a kurd!
 In 1985, Iraqi soldiers took my youngest brother out of his class and they shot him in front of the local people. He was just 13 years old. Later, they forced my Dad to pay for the bullet that killed him. I lost 24 close relatives in 1988 in Saddam's offensive against the Kurds. In 1991, I lost 2 nephews and my grandmother. We reached the point where we believe there is nowhere safe for a Kurd.



- 10 Sometimes things are not what they seem
 Peter is a citizen of Lithuania. He is a professional musician and writes, performs and produces Christian music. His lyrics were interpreted as political by the authorities and brought their wrath upon him. Pressurised and persecuted by the police, he refused to comply with their demands. It cost him dearly. He was imprisoned and raped. In 1997, as a result of police harassment his wife had a miscarriage.

At an evangelistic gathering in Easter 1998, he was again harassed, beaten and imprisoned by the police. He feared for his life. But as he lay in the prison hospital it was as though the Holy Spirit reinforced his resolve. New strength flooded through him. He would not give in. He would continue to evangelise and sing his songs of faith in Jesus, even if it meant leaving home.

He fled from his country with his family and asked for asylum in the UK in October 1998. He was immediately placed in a detention centre for two weeks and believed the Lithuanian police and the British Immigration Officers must be in collusion. No State official could be trusted. Peter was in a state of confusion. In November the Home Office declined his claim for asylum and instructed him to return to Lithuania. A week later he lodged an appeal on the grounds that he had 'a well-founded fear of persecution'.

The appeal was heard in July 1999 and the tribunal considered a written statement from Peter, a psychiatric report and a letter from the Vicar of the church where he worships. Thankfully he was represented by a barrister from the Refugee Legal Centre, and he was granted exceptional leave to remain.

Now Peter, his wife and children have settled in South London. His

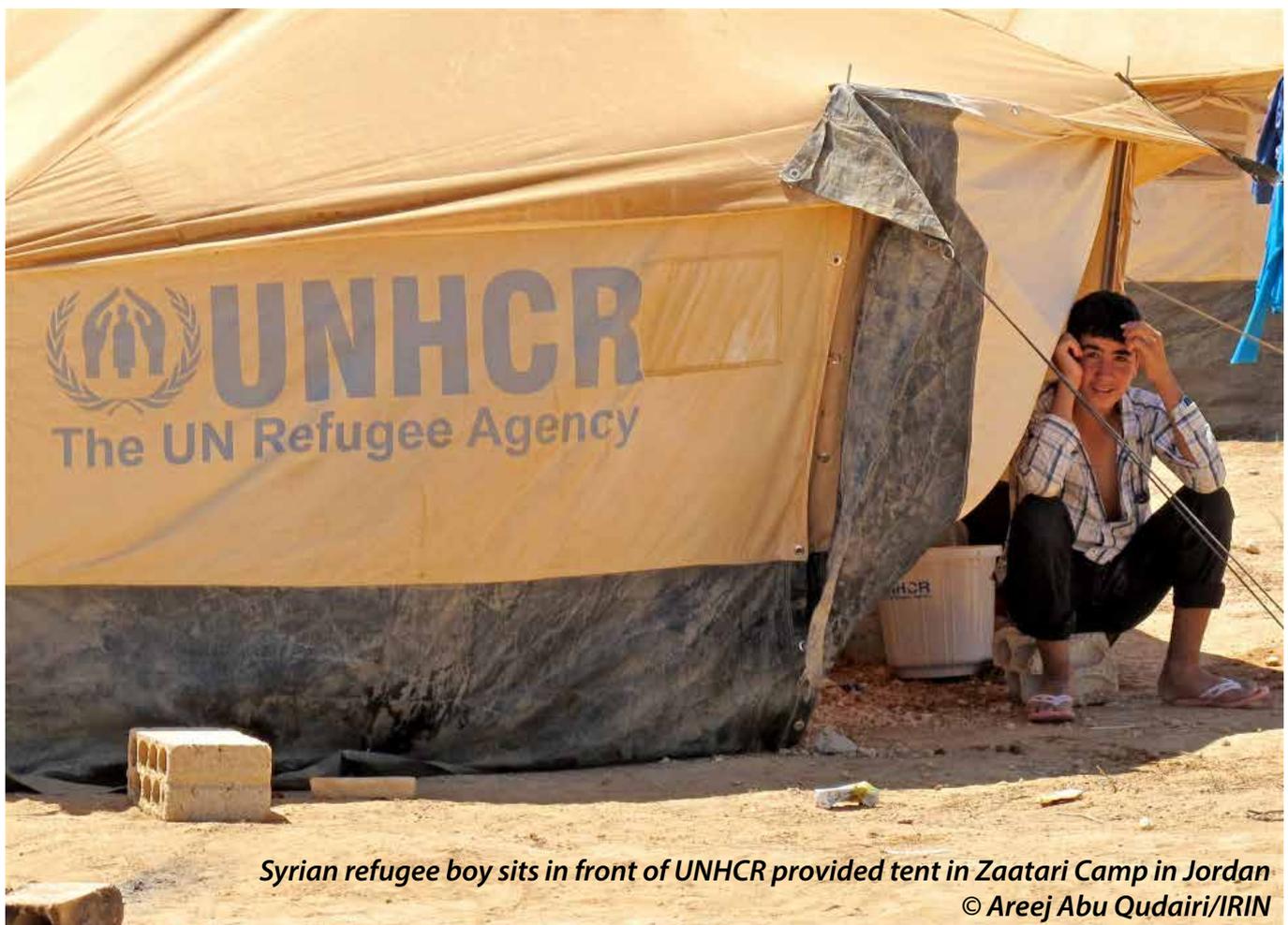
children are at school and are speaking English quite fluently - albeit with a South London accent - and Peter is working on translating his songs into English. Lithuania is an independent democratic country and Peter's claim of persecution seems far-fetched, but we have begun to learn that things are not always what they seem.

11 'I was shot twice..'
I worked with the trade unions in Columbia. In 1985 approximately 70 union leaders were assassinated. I constantly received death threats. I had to go into hiding. In 1988 I was shot twice - once in the front, once in the back - and left for dead by two armed assassins. I was paralysed from the waist down for nearly three years. I still have great trouble walking. I thought about suicide when I first got to Britain. I felt like a coward for leaving my family, friends and colleagues.

12 'Unconscious for 2 days'
I haven't had any news of my parents, my wife, my brothers and sisters since I arrived here at the beginning of 1998. Since 1982 my family has been persecuted by the Iraqi regime. They wanted to forcefully deport us from our villages. They used a mechanical digger to destroy our house.

I was arrested in 1987. I was tortured both physically and mentally. They once, interrogated me for 35 hours. I collapsed and was unconscious for 2 days. At least 3 people in prison with me died under torture. Others were executed. Physically I'm here, but mentally I'm at home.

13 Fear does not go away
I got out of Iran in 1983. I am still too scared of what the authorities would do to the people who helped me escape if I reveal the details of my story.



Syrian refugee boy sits in front of UNHCR provided tent in Zaatari Camp in Jordan

© Areej Abu Qudairi/IRIN

Baptist Responses

Our Baptist churches have stories to tell - stories of how communities and individual Christians are responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. It is worth telling these stories, for they remind us that however big the task may appear and however small our resources may be, we can do something. They offer us inspiration and encouragement. They help us to see what 'good practice' looks like.

As refugees and asylum seekers are increasingly sent to different places around the country, you are likely to have groups coming to live near you. They may already be your neighbours. We can learn from these stories and so be able to offer a welcome to the stranger on our doorstep.

The following two stories have been shared by two churches which were actively engaged in supporting refugees in the 1990s, and are an inspiration to us now in this current crisis.

Memorial Baptist Church, Plaistow

We are set in the heart of the London Borough of Newham, and number about sixty adults and over twenty children. Over the last four years we have experienced new growth as over thirty new people have begun worshipping with us, many of whom have recently come from Central Africa. Newham is a good place to live, a vibrant and colourful place where over sixty languages are spoken on a daily basis. It has always been a place of transition where immigrant communities make their first home in this country, some of whom have fled their own countries fearing violence and persecution.

Our work with refugees wasn't something we planned; it was one of God's surprises. Over the last ten years the people of our church have become friends of ten different families of asylum seekers and several individuals too. Many come from what was known as Zaire or from Kenya.

We have simply responded as good neighbours to the people we meet and

have learned some important lessons. For example, it is a mistake to imagine that asylum seekers are merely poor people in need of our help. Most often the poor do not have the means to escape. Many are actually gifted and resourceful people who are eager to do all they can to support their families. Although asylum seekers have different faiths and none, there are many Christians among them. We have grown through their gifts of spirituality and song and we now have ten asylum seekers in membership, with one elected as a deacon of the church.

Another lesson was that just listening can be important. It can be a real gift because people often need to tell their stories. Sometimes this can be harrowing because of the horrendous experiences they have been through. Offering practical help can be very important too. This doesn't mean doing things the people could do for themselves, but sometimes there are occasions when just having a better grasp of English can be really valuable. We have accompanied people to a doctor, the housing departments, the hospital during pregnancy, as well as

helping to furnish and decorate houses. One time, we even stood bail when a refugee was released from the Immigration Service Detention Centre.

We are keenly aware that there are real limits to what we can do and that sometimes we need more professional help than we are capable of offering. One of the most valuable things we have done is to establish what other local agencies can offer help and support to refugees around us.

Downs Baptist Church, Hackney

In 1989 there was an influx of refugees from persecution in Turkey. The then very small congregation at Downs decided to invite many to sleep in the church. This was the beginning of our work with the very needy asylum seekers in London.

In 1990 London City Mission were able to offer the church the support of a Turkish-speaking missionary, Tim Spring, who has been with us ever since. He works tirelessly to connect with Turkish and Kurdish families all over the city. Many are now firm friends of the church and several regularly attend drop-ins, bible studies and services.

Our church has become well-known for the time we were privileged to host the Ogunwobi family, offering them sanctuary within our building. Sunday, Bumni and the children became a much-loved part of our church family for a total of thirty-nine months. They were eventually given permission to stay in Britain and have made good their commitment to God and the local community. Sunday is now training for ministry and has recently been elected as a local councillor. The prayers of the Christian family world-wide were the significant factor of the success of the appeal. But the legal basis centred on the compassionate needs of the children. This is a vital recognition that

all too often innocent children are caught up in the legal wranglings of our immigration law. Jesus is concerned for children, and so should we be.

The church continues to welcome many who have been, or are, asylum seekers. Services tend to be interactive, though the sermon is retained, and translation in the evening is an expected element which works well. The Thursday Drop-in for refugees is now well-established, though more volunteer helpers are needed as the work expands. Other drop-ins are being planned for the future which will no doubt include refugee needs in their remit.

“ My dream is to go back to my land... we used to grow our own food... we want to start our lives again... we want to look after our children ourselves”

Afghan refugee

We are 'blessed' with a very run-down building, part of which is unusable. Our dream is to provide a fully equipped Community Centre to serve the local people and we have been privileged to become an integral part of the neighbourhood regeneration on the local estate and primary school.

In addition to our evening service in Turkish, we hold a special children's service at the school once a month, attracting many from refugee homes. We are in the process of moving into cell-groups as the primary unit of our church, and this will lend itself to developing worshipping groups on language and needs lines. The traditional Sunday services will continue, but more as a celebration of what the Lord is doing among us in smaller groups.

Downs Baptist Church is constantly undergoing change. I would describe this change in terms of a church of 'voices and choices', to be shared and heard. Most of all we are seeking to hear the voice of God and to make choices in line with his will.

What Can We Do?

More and more churches have opportunities to come into contact with refugees and asylum seekers. You can read up-to-date stories of churches actively involved in supporting refugees in this current crisis on our website at www.baptist.org.uk/refugees

Stories of good practice enable us to see what can be done. It may involve:

- » creating a Day Centre that provides a place of open hospitality;
- » arranging social events;
- » giving help and advice about local services;
- » personal befriending and visiting;
- » providing suitable accommodation;
- » offering particular help, such as clothing and furniture, or language lessons and legal advice.

In deciding what we can do, we must seek to match the needs that exist with our own abilities to act, and that involves taking account of the following simple principles and guidelines.

Make Partnerships

Begin by listening and talking with authorities, agencies and other churches in your area. Your local authority, local education authority and local health authority may already have people working alongside refugees, who will be able to identify where needs exist. Voluntary agencies may already be co-operating in the task of welcoming and supporting refugees arriving in the community. Find out what is happening and be willing to work with others.

If as a result of this process your church decides to set up a new initiative, continue the work of building partnerships. Get to know others and get yourselves known. Seek out within other churches who might work with you. Whatever you may be able to

offer to refugees, you will not be able to meet all their diverse needs and expectations, and so it will be important to liaise with, for example, refugee community organisations, the CAB network, youth groups, as well as the various statutory authorities.

Plan Carefully

An encounter with human hurt, isolation and need demands that we respond. But the way we respond needs thought and care if we are not to do more harm than good. It is important that what we do, whether as churches or as individuals, is:

- » Achievable
- » Realistic
- » Measurable
- » Specific

Don't be afraid to start small. It is better to successfully open a Day Centre once a week, than to make a promise to open daily and then find it is too much. It is better to offer to sustain a meaningful friendship with one family, than attempt to help ten or twenty and find the task is beyond you. Try to be as sure as possible that you are not starting something you cannot finish. It is far better for the work to grow and develop over time, than to have to close down after just a few weeks. While there is value in short-term projects, we will need to remember that many of those arriving as refugees will feel very insecure and lost. The task of building up trust and winning confidence can only happen with time.

Don't be afraid to start simple. Many refugees find themselves in a strange area with few contacts and poor accommodation. As much as anything, they need another place to go to and the chance to build friendships with others in a similar situation. Where young children are involved, the need to have somewhere else to go is even more pressing. Thus, the simple provision of space to meet, drink coffee and chat can be of immense value.

Don't be afraid to say 'no'. Refugees have many different needs, some of which require specialist attention. Not everything will - or can - be our responsibility, and it is important to establish clear boundaries. Think through your aims and priorities. Stay clearly focussed. Know what you can do and what you can't do. Take careful account of the resources you have available, both financial and human. Try to ensure that any project has the support and backing of the church.

Seek Training

There are courses and events on offer aimed at helping and equipping those who are working alongside refugees, and many of these are advertised in 'iNexile' (see Reading and Resource Material). These offer the opportunity to build up specialist understanding and knowledge, and to

make contact with others working in the field. Both the Red Cross and the Medical Foundation have the kind of experience required in assisting those who have suffered the trauma of violence and torture, and their help can be vital. The demands placed on volunteers who are faced with such stories can be immense, and access to proper support is essential.

When setting up a new project, it is also worth planning a visit to one that is already operating. The chance to see existing work, to discover the possibilities and the pitfalls, and to exchange information can do much to inspire and help the initial process of making decisions and getting started.

Learn Sensitivity

Attention to the cultural and religious codes of those who are refugees is important. They may be different from our own. They may determine dress, gender roles behaviour and dietary requirements.

In particular, we must respect those of other faiths. Refugees and asylum seekers are in a very vulnerable position, and we must not use our position of strength to engage in evangelism.

Raise Awareness

People's views and attitudes are shaped in a number of ways, not least by the media, and it is clear that certain sections of the media have led a concerted campaign against asylum seekers. False and misleading information has shaped opinions, and has led to open hatred and violence. As Christians with a responsibility to 'welcome the stranger', we will want to offer an alternative picture - both to those within our church and those outside.

Take time to learn a few simple facts. Write to local newspapers highlighting the work you are doing. Put articles in church magazines. Encourage your church to learn and pray.

Making Plans For A New Project

STEP ONE	<i>Listening</i>	<p><i>Where is help needed?</i></p> <p><i>Who is it possible to work with?</i></p> <p><i>What might be done?</i></p>
STEP TWO	<i>Preparing</i>	<p><i>Build partnerships</i></p> <p><i>Focus plans and goals</i></p> <p><i>Establish a Steering Group</i></p> <p><i>Decide requirements – budget, premises, staffing, training</i></p>
STEP THREE	<i>Acting</i>	<p><i>Clarify timetable</i></p> <p><i>Gather resources</i></p> <p><i>Implement plans</i></p>
STEP FOUR	<i>Evaluating</i>	<p><i>Have the goals been met?</i></p> <p><i>What has gone well or not so well?</i></p> <p><i>How have the volunteers managed?</i></p> <p><i>What changes and improvements are needed?</i></p>

Worship, Prayer and Study

Sermon outline

1 Peter 1:1a; 2:11-12 - Lessons from Peter's first letter

Introduction

A discussion of how we commonly use terms like 'alien' and 'stranger': aliens tend to induce fear, and in many early films they are seen as the enemy. Not until 'Close Encounters' and 'ET' did we begin to recognise that relationships with aliens might be positive. Strangers tend to be surrounded with suspicion: children are taught not to talk to them. Does this reveal our natural prejudice against anything and anyone unknown?

Yet Peter talks about Christians as aliens and strangers.

We are to see sin as alien and so be strangers to its practice. We are refugees in an evil world, fleeing into the arms of a loving God who offers security and hope. What, then, do we learn about Christian refugee status from Peter?

Holiness is a mark of God's refugee people

Rather than pointing the finger at others we are urged to abstain from the practices of our former lives (1 :13-2:3). By such holy living we become strangers and outsiders in a sinful world. Prior to conversion we are alien to God. When Christ comes to us we become aliens in a world of death because we are brought to life by his Spirit.

Mission is a mark of God's refugee people

The holy living of these strangers bears testimony to the power of God. This can be a force not only for good, but also in leading outsiders to embrace the same new birth that Jesus offers. Outsiders may not understand our language or our cultural expression of the faith. But universal to humanity is the language of love, shown through acts of kindness and grace. This is practised most effectively through a community seeking to live in obedient holiness, such that it can no longer be ignored. Those who see it will either want to embrace it or destroy it. Refugee mission is dangerous!

“ You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself”

Luke 10:27

Worship is a mark of God's refugee people

The strength to be different - to be aliens and strangers on an alternative journey - comes from the very personal, relational interaction with our God. Prayer and worship together galvanise our individual hope into the faith of a set-apart community of disciples, We are those who worship a different king, pursue (mission) life to different ends, and travel an alternative holy road expecting our Lord to appear at any time,

Conclusion

Refugees are driven by fear and terror to seek safety, security and survival in a foreign land. But Christians are a refugee community from the sinful world driven, not by fear and terror away from suffering, but by love and obedience often into a place of suffering.

They can do so only through the eternal security found in God, practised in holiness, purposed in mission and celebrated in worship to the glory of God and the service of outsiders.

Thus it is natural for the Christian community to be strongly identified with the refugee, the asylum seeker, the outcast, the lost and afraid. It is precisely these marginalized people for whom the gospel is good news. It is in the midst of this alien world that we can expect to see the power of the resurrection at work.

Hymns, Prayers and Readings

From our lack of care for those who are in exile - the refugee, the migrant and the asylum seeker:

Save us, O Lord

From our prejudice and ignorance towards those who are different - the stranger, the alien and the foreigner;

Save us, O Lord

From our failure to see the face of Christ in those we meet, and to welcome them in the name of Christ:

Save us, O Lord

To those who bear the scars of hatred and violence, and who long for peace and healing:

Send us, O Lord

To those who are lost and alone in an unknown land, and who need the hand of friendship and the gift of hospitality:

Send us, O Lord

To those who cry out for a hope and a future, and who search for a place they can call home:

Send us, O Lord

By the rivers of foreign countries we sat down as refugees, there we wept when we remembered the land of our birth.

We stopped singing our beloved songs of liberation.

Those who helped our enemies wanted us to sing;

they wanted us to entertain them:

Sing us a song about the land whence you fled.

How can they expect us to entertain them with our suffering and tears?

May I never turn our struggle for freedom and peace into entertainment for those who are friends of our enemies!

May I never be able to sing again if I do not remember you, if I do not think of you, O country of my birth!

Remember, Lord, what the oppressors did the day they turned us into refugees.

Remember how they kept saying: Let us destroy them completely!

(Version of Ps 137 from Namibia)

Jesus, our friend and companion,

You were a refugee,
forced to flee from death and violence,
forced to seek safety in a foreign land.

You know what it is
to be rejected by your own people,
to have nowhere to lay your head.

Be with all in our world who have lost home,
land, family and future,

and who have come to this country for
refuge.

Give us grace and compassion.

Teach us understanding and sensitivity,

Help us to offer the gift of hospitality.

Amen

Don't call me a stranger:
*I need to communicate especially when
language is not understood.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*I need to be together, especially when loneliness
cools my heart.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*I need to feel at home, especially when mine is
very far away from yours.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*I need a family, because mine I've left to work
for yours.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*the soil we step on is the same, but mine is not
'the promised land.'*

Don't call me a stranger:
*the colour of my passport is different, but the
colour of our blood is the same.*

Don't-call me a stranger:
*the language I speak sounds different, but the
feelings it expresses are the same.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*I toil and struggle in your land, and the sweat of
our brows is the same.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*borders we created them, and the separation
that results is the same.*

Don't call me a-stranger:
*I am just your friend, but you do not know me
yet.*

Don't call me a stranger:
*we cry for justice and peace in different ways,
but our God is the same.*

Don't call me a stranger:
yes! I am a migrant but our God is the same.

Amen!

Source: WCC – 'A Moment to Choose'

Further suitable readings and prayers

More resources can be found in

A Procession of Prayers compiled by John
Carden (Cassell and WCC, 1998)

Bread of Tomorrow edited by Janet Morley
(SPCK and Christian Aid, 1992)

Songs and Hymns

The following is a selection of music that can
help a congregation bring the needs of the
world to God, especially remembering those
who are refugees:

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair

Christ's is the world in which we move

Filled with compassion

For the healing of the nations

God of freedom, God of Justice*

God of justice, Saviour to all

Great is the Darkness

How do we start to touch the broken hearts

'I have a dream,' a man once said*

Jesus Christ is waiting*

Like a flicker in the darkness

Love incarnate (with a prayer you fed the
hungry)

O Lord, the clouds are gathering

Passover God, we remember your
faithfulness*

Soften my heart, Lord

We hear you cry Lord

When the Church of Jesus*

Yesu, Yesu, fill us with your love*

*to be found in 'Baptist Praise and Worship'

Bible Studies

1 MARY and JOSEPH

What would happen if Mary and Joseph were refugees today?

Read [Matthew 2: 13-18](#) and invite people to reflect on the following questions.

- 1 Why did Mary and Joseph leave their own country?
What would have happened if they had stayed?
- 2 How would Mary and Joseph convince an immigration officer that their story was true? (An immigration officer has the power to send you to a detention centre if they think you are lying or suspicious.)
- 3 If the headlines in Egypt said that the country was in danger from a flood of bogus refugees from the north pretending to be persecuted, what kind of welcome would they have received?
- 4 Mary and Joseph were Jews who can only eat kosher food. If they were given food vouchers for their local supermarket, and they couldn't work and had little cash, what advice would you give them?

These dilemmas face refugees entering Britain today. In the Old Testament, God reminded his people of their own history and required them to welcome the refugee and the stranger: read [Ex 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:33-4; Dt 10:18-19](#).

MARGARET'S STORY

Ask someone to read Margaret's story slowly. Warn people it may shock them.

'My husband Martin and I were members of an opposition party in Kenya seeking reform through the ballot box. In 1995, the head of the civil service announced a crack down on our party supporters and members. When the police came to our house they shot our dog and kicked the door down. They told Martin to sit on the floor, kicked him and pointed a gun at his head. Then they bundled him into the boot of their car and took him away.

I heard nothing and after a week had almost given up hope. A friend who had offered a

bribe to the police was told that there was no record of his arrest. After two weeks we found him in hospital, he had been tortured and lost much blood. His face was covered in bruises. After two days Martin discharged himself and went into hiding. Soon after that he fled the country. As soon as the police discovered this they came and arrested me. Over sixty people were crammed in my cell. Some of them were badly injured and I bled too much. The walls were covered in dry blood, urine and excrement. The next day I was pulled out.

Three policemen took me to a room and forced me to strip. they threatened to kill me and demanded to know where Martin was. They threw me down, whipped me and kicked me with their boots. They dislocated my arm. I was in too much pain and fainted. Two people died in our cell and because they thought I would also die, they sent me to the hospital.

When I was discharged I was told to report to the police twice a week. A kindly female officer told me they were preparing a false confession that I would be forced to sign. She told me to flee and so I went in to hiding.

My brother and sister secured a passport for me and bribed the immigration officials so I could leave the country. This was very scary and painful too, because though I took the two small children with me I had to leave two others behind.'

Leave a silence at the end of the reading, then think about these questions.

- 1 How does this story make you feel?
- 2 What questions do you want to ask Margaret?
- 3 What do you think God would say to her?
- 4 If someone like Margaret came to live near you, would you be afraid?
- 5 What would you seek to do for her if she was seeking a welcome in your church or locality?
- 6 What difference does it make that Margaret is a Christian?

Ask the group to read [Matthew 25:31-46](#). Finish with prayer for yourselves, your neighbourhood and the people in need of a welcome.

2 STRANGERS AND ALIENS

Play the music from a film such as *ET*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters* or *Star Trek*.

Ask the group to play a game of word association, beginning with the word 'alien'. Do the same with the word 'stranger'.

Ask different members of the group to read the following texts (choose a translation that uses the word 'alien'): [Lev 19:33-4](#), [Dt 24:14,17](#); [27:19](#); [Jer 7:6-7](#), [Mal 3:5](#)

Consider the following questions:

- 1 Why does God tell his people not to oppress the alien?
- 2 Think about your nationality. how would you describe yourself? Is nationality a gift of God? What does God value more – nationality or justice? Why?
- 3 Is patriotism a Christian virtue? Think about football and the last night of the proms!
- 4 In the light of these verses what should our attitude and concern for asylum seekers be?

Read [Luke 10:25-37](#). When we read this parable we take it for granted we should be like the Good Samaritan but there are times when we are more like the man on the road. The men who passed by had good reasons for not helping the injured man – the muggers could still be about, and to stop would be costly and inconvenient. But most of all they would be compromised by touching someone who was ritually unclean because of his injuries.

- 1 Can you think of a time when you felt like an alien or stranger? How did it affect you?
- 2 How do you feel when you meet someone in urgent need of help? Inadequate, inconvenienced, frightened?
- 3 What reasons can you think of for not helping asylum seekers?
- 4 The man on the road needed a safe place to rest and recover from his ordeal. What kinds of needs do you think asylum seekers have?

HATICE'S STORY

Ask someone to read Hatice's story. Her name is pronounced Hat-i-j.

'I arrived in the UK some ten years ago. I originally came as a twenty-three year old au pair, though I could not speak English. I worked in the home of an English family and gradually began to learn English but I was still very lonely until I met Hussain. We were married a year later but it was some time before he confessed to me that he had a wife at home in Turkey. I was devastated. He had succeeded in gaining refugee status and was running his own restaurant. By now we were living quite comfortably and had two children.

After two years of marriage Hussain was arrested on a drug charge and imprisoned. After serving a four-year sentence he was stripped of his refugee status and deported. He was arrested on arrival in Turkey where he was still on a wanted list

I now live in the UK with no recognised status though I am seeking refugee status. As a single parent in Turkey I would not be able to secure education for my children or other rights. My children were both born here and know no other culture or society. They are very happy and we remain part of a very supportive Christian church.

The church has assisted me through their refugee support worker, providing advice and translation. They have also, helped me move house and find schools for the children.'

What questions and issues does this story raise? How would your church respond to Hatice?

Close by offering your thoughts to God in prayer. The group may want to use songs, draw pictures or write poems.

Appendix

Facts, Figures and Further Support

For the most up-to-date information about the law and statistics concerning refugees and asylum seekers, we recommend that you explore the websites of the following specialist agencies:

Refugee Council

This is the largest organisation in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Asylum Aid

An independent, national charity working to secure protection for people seeking refuge in the UK from persecution and human rights abuses abroad.

www.asylumaid.org.uk

Refugee Action

Helps people who've survived some of the world's worst regimes to find the basic support they need to live with dignity.

www.refugee-action.org.uk

United Nations High Commission for Refugees

The UNHCR helps world uprooted peoples by providing them with basic necessities in emergencies and in seeking long term solutions.

www.unhcr.org.uk

The Immigration and Asylum Act

Introduced in 1999, this has had many amendments to it since then, can be accessed from:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/33/contents

Church Action on Poverty

A national ecumenical Christian social justice charity committed to tackling poverty in the UK.

www.church-poverty.org.uk

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Campaign for justice by combating racism in immigration and asylum law and policy.

www.jcwi.org.uk

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International Trade

Authors: Jonathan Reuvid and Jim Sherlock

Publisher: Kogan Page Limited (2011)

ISBN: 978-0749462376

Dead Aid

Author: Dambisa Moyo

Publisher: Penguin (2010)

ISBN: 978-0141031187

The Politics of Jesus

Author: John Howard Yoder

Publisher: William B Eerdmans (1996)

ISBN: 978-08028073421



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