

Our Brothers and Sisters in a Foreign Land

Yes, they are our brothers and sisters; yes, they are living in a foreign land; and yes, we do not want to talk about them. The reality of nearly 4 million people who are “refugees” – either waiting for asylum in one of the Western countries or waiting for a way to escape the refugee camps of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria – makes us very uncomfortable. We do not want to see the images from the TV, we feel totally powerless, and we want to ignore the problems. However, our faith does not allow us to forget them.

The on-going war conflicts in Syria and Iraq have created an untenable situation for entire populations who are trying to escape threats to their lives, families, as well as religious persecution. The refugee camps that were established as “transitory” have ended up being permanent settlements for many. They wait with either the hope of a permanent relocation in the Western countries or the possibility of returning home after the war. After almost five years, hope disappears quickly!

Pope Francis has repeated again and again the need for resolving this crisis. Almost weekly, he asks nations to respond to this humanitarian crisis by opening their borders and providing basic help (food, healthcare) to the people living in the refugee camps. The Gospel, as well as the Old Testament, reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, all members of the same humanity, all deserving the same dignity and rights to a peaceful life.

In this world crisis –its scope not experienced since WW II – the United States has been reluctant to act and allow refugees from Syria into this country. Some presidential candidates have repeated again and again the need to make the vetting process more rigorous. (Currently takes 18-36 months.) President Obama made the commitment to the United Nations to accept 10,000 refugees in 2016. Our Congress is trying to reduce this number to 2,500.

What can we do as people of faith? Possible actions:

1. Write letters to your Representative and Senators asking them to both increase the number of entries in the US and make the vetting process more efficient.
2. Support the integration of the families coming to the United States by working with resettlement agencies. (See listing on page 3) We could, as a parish community, adopt a family.
3. Donate to resettlement agencies and organizations working directly in the refugee camps in the Middle East.
4. **Support our Outreach Ministry efforts to collect diapers/baby wipes to be shipped to refugee camps in the Iraq-Syria area. Details in bulletin.**

Jacques Pasquier

Dear Jesus the Christ,

You promised to send us a helper, your Spirit. Help us to see your Spirit in those you send to journey with us. In the refugee family, seeking safety from violence, **Let us see your Spirit.** In the migrant worker, bringing food to our tables, **Let us see your Spirit.** In the asylum-seeker, seeking justice for himself and his family, **Let us see your Spirit.** In the unaccompanied child, traveling in a dangerous world, **Let us see your Spirit.** Teach us to recognize that as we walk with each other, You are present. Teach us to welcome not only the strangers In our midst but the gifts they bring as well; the invitation to conversion, communion, and solidarity. This is the help you have sent: we are not alone. We are together on the journey, and for this we give you thanks. Amen.

Interfaith Worker Justice, www.iwj.org



Syrian Refugees: Why the fear?

While most of us abhor the terrible images of refugees fleeing their countries, our “white privilege” allows us to disengage usually with a click of a remote. (Let me switch to baseball!) We do not have to bear the actual sufferings and despair of refugees. Indifference is a safe haven. Yet ISIS terrorists may strike again somewhere. Wouldn't it be awful if we let refugees into this country and ISIS suicide bombers got in too?

However, the refugees are not the problem, “fear mongering” is. Let's check the facts:

- The Syrian refugees that are referred to the U.S. for resettlement are living in camps in the Middle East, such as Turkey and Jordan, and are mainly women and children. They are not would-be terrorists traveling into Europe with refugees.
- A total of 85,000 refugees from throughout the world will be admitted in the U.S. during the fiscal year 2016; this includes the proposed 10,000 Syrian refugees.
- Coming to America as a refugee is one of the least efficient ways for a jihadist to get into this country. It can take 18-36 months to secure refugee status.

- Since 1980, the U.S. has invited in millions of refugees, NOT ONE has committed an act of terrorism in the U.S. The Boston Marathon bombers came into the U.S. as children of asylum parents and, as minors, were not in the refugee admissions screening program.

Fear paralyzes our hearts. Psychologically, what you feed is what grows! Gratitude expands your desire to share. Open, embracing hearts can heal the wounds of our global family. **“We live in a cold time, and we must now pray for the warming of hearts and opening of minds.”**
- Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

B. J. Schlachter

*facts from Factschecked.com, Reason.com, and Inquisitor.com.

Who We Should Really Fear

Number of Americans killed by ISIS last year: 4
Number of Americans killed by furniture last year: 17
Number of Americans killed by Americans with guns last year: .. 30,638

-profoundlymark

Refugee Sponsorship in Canada

I am Susan Nye-Brothers, Coordinator of Refugee Sponsorship in the Diocese of Prince Edward Island, Canada. Upon Canada's announcement that they were committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees within the span of four months, the flood gates opened and it was time to step up and "welcome the stranger, care for the poor, the children and the widows." Let me share one story.

A Syrian National, now a permanent resident of Canada, walks into my office wanting my help in bringing some of his family here as part of Canada's commitment. Now, I receive at least half a dozen e-mails, letters or phone calls a day from people hoping that I can help them. As a preface to our conversation, I had the obligation to tell him that "I can't make any promises but I'll do all I can to help you." We go through all the formal questions, but then I did something I had not done before – I turned my chair towards his and asked the question, "What is it REALLY like in Syria?"

Now, I firmly believe that God allows us opportunities for growth when we're ready, but I had forgotten how much growth can truly hurt. I honestly don't know if one can truly be ready to hear the descriptive words that I heard from that man that day. He had enough foresight to see the "writing on the wall" five and a half years ago that his country was going to be in the worst civil war they'd probably ever see. He left with his family then, because he knew if he stayed, he would be forced to fight or be killed on the spot for resisting, that his wife would be raped and his children would be sold into slavery. He spoke of the sheer "savagery" that his family has witnessed; and he spoke of the horrible fate that some of his own family and friends have met at the hands of ISIS.

The details he provided were what I asked for, but I was in no way prepared to hear them. In retrospect, I don't think we're ever really meant to hear them—they just shouldn't be! As my gut literally

wrenched (I thought I was going to be sick!), this lovely man, looked me in the eyes and said, "This is NOT Islam... this is NOT what we believe." I dared to reach out and put my hand on his and said, "I'm so sorry, I can't even imagine, and thank you for trusting me." To my surprise, he let my hand rest on his and there we sat. He looked deeply into my eyes and said "We're all the same. We just want to live in peace." This was a soul-to-soul encounter – we're all just the same.

I'm still haunted by the images he placed in my head that day. And by so many other horrific stories. This haunting that God allows me to sit with every day motivates me to help as I can. Even if it is simply taking the risk to place my hand on another's and cry with them.

(Susan is a SJF member, living/working in Canada, returning to the U.S. this year)



Our lives are bound together.

My well-being is woven into yours and yours into mine. Our well-being is bound to the well-being of bees and trees and wolves and water. The ties between us may break, the tapestry may tear. Yet still, always, new threads make their way into the weave, securing the pieces in new ways. Sometimes we may be those threads, stretching to bring together parts torn from one another. We may struggle to live in the middle - between order and disorder, between what is and what may be.

An excerpt from Mercy at the Margins, JustFaith Ministries newsletter 2016

Syrian Refugees: Starting Over

At an Interfaith Symposium hosted by Christ Church Cranbrook, members of our SJF faith family heard from a panel of six how refugee families are resettled. Below are some of the things that we learned:

- Each resettlement agency accepts new cases based on their organization's capacity (e.g. caseload, budget).
- Refugee families are sent all over the U.S. by the resettlement agency, not by the government. Each case is reviewed based on a number of factors (e.g., family ties, language skills, employment, etc.)
- Michigan has resettled 335 Syrian refugees since the Syrian Civil War began in 2011 (Detroit News)
- The goal is help the families achieve personal independence and economic self-sufficiency in 90 days. This goal is very challenging! Refugee families start out with nothing and their needs are great. They must learn a new language, a new culture, integrate into a new community, find transportation, learn new job skills, training/employment and enroll their children in school. They need the documents/clearances that allow them to do so.
- One panelist explained that local organizations have 1-3 weeks to prepare to receive a family. This includes all preparations such as rental housing and donated furniture and household supplies.
- Another panelist, a psychologist, reminded us that most of these families were victims of terrorism. She helps families to heal from the ongoing effects of living in an environment of fear and violence.
- All of these resettlement organizations have limited staff and funds and rely on volunteers. More volunteers are needed. See the listing of agencies on the right.

Sylvia Graham



"Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War... we must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation."
- Pope Francis, Address to U.S. Congress, 2015

Aiding Refugees...

- **Catholic Relief Services, Doctors Without Borders, and UNICEF** are involved in providing for the basic needs of refugees in the resettlement camps. These organizations are in great need of financial aid. Check their web sites for contact information.
- **U. S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants** (USCRI-Detroit) helps families resettling in Detroit set up new lives. Many new and used household items are needed. If interested in donating, contact Zeina Hamade 313-581-4420 or zhamade@uscric-detroit.org.
- **Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan** www.ccsem.org or 586-416-1113
- **Samaritas** (formerly Lutheran Social Services of Michigan) largest resettlement agency in Michigan. Donations, mentors and volunteers are needed. 2566 Walton Blvd., Rochester Hills, 248-402-0071.
- **Syrian American Rescue Network (SARN)** provides aid to refugees as they come into Michigan. Donations and volunteers needed. 3525 Starr Road, Royal Oak, www.sarn-us.org/
- **Justice for Immigrants Network, Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform.** Advocacy work under the auspices of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. jfi@uscpcb.org or www.justiceforimmigrants.org.