



Refugee Week

Tue 16 - Mon 22 June

Food in the desert

Exodus 16 – John 6:32-35

“We wish the Lord had killed us in Egypt. There we could at least sit down and eat meat and as much other food as we wanted.”

Designed to be read in Print Layout view.

Churches have been in the forefront of efforts to highlight the desperate situation of refugees and asylum-seekers. Many of them have taken the initiative in forming support groups and other local projects which can channel the energies of willing volunteers, supportive lawyers and many other extremely committed volunteers.

Stories of refugees and displaced peoples are very prevalent in the Bible, giving rise to many opportunities for prayer, reflection and action that can be woven directly into the life of the congregation.

Main courses

Bible connections and theological themes

The story of Exodus is the story of refugees. Wandering in the wilderness is a powerful metaphor for the experience of being homeless and stateless. People in such circumstances only own what they can carry and, trapped between an intolerable past and an uncertain future, life becomes very tenuous indeed. Miracles become the order of the day and sustenance often comes by way of the unfamiliar and unexpected. When food supplies are so uncertain, the promise of unceasing nourishment from the Bread of Life takes on even greater significance. As another angle on this theme, remember that nomadic peoples have lived in the desert for countless generations, migrating across political boundaries in search of food, water and grazing. In purely human terms it is not so odd to be “on the move” – in fact it is the characteristic human state: it is being settled that is unusual. What makes the refugee experience distinctive is the element of force, either circumstantial or direct.

Psalm 71

This moving Psalm repays reflection from the point of view of the refugee. The repeated cry for protection, the steadfast reliance on God for guidance and shelter, the sense of looking back on a lifetime of displacement and insecurity yet with a profound note of gratitude; all of these connect powerfully with the refugee experience. This Psalm would lend itself to being read in short sections interspersed with other material as part of a service with a focus on the plight of refugees.

2 Timothy 1:15-18f

Because of UK government policy, many asylum seekers who arrive in the country quickly find themselves in detention. In this passage, the apostle Paul praises an early Christian who was persistent in looking for him when he was imprisoned in Rome. (Such a ministry also features in the famous parable of Matthew 25:31-46) Refugees and asylum seekers tend to have few friends and the role of the Christian community in challenging the culture of detention and bringing practical support to refugees of all kinds is crucial in terms of social justice.

Mae deunydd Cymraeg ar gael o www.ctbi.org.uk/racialjusticesunday
a www.cytun.org.uk

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



Desserts

Intercessions & petitions

For all those forced to leave their homes as refugees

For the growing number of unaccompanied young people who become refugees

For statutory and especially voluntary agencies seeking to help refugees

For communities called upon to receive refugees

For the churches which have the opportunity of offering practical support for refugees and of influencing the welcome they experience

For the increasing numbers of people around the world who are displaced as a result of accelerating climate change

For refugees who suffer from discrimination in the countries in which they settle

For governments and international bodies like the UN who have responsibility for responding to and preventing the movement of refugees

[Photos of berries:](#) BitHead



Examples of community action

Visit the website of Adalberto United Methodist Church, Chicago. This church has been very involved with sanctuary and other ways of supporting refugees. Use this American example to give a different perspective on what may be possible in your community.

Refugees, almost by definition, often feel marginal to the society in which they settle. Your church and others in the area could arrange a "Culture Day" where the languages, traditions, food, music etc. of refugees are celebrated and shared by the whole community.

Often more can be achieved when congregations work together: there is an even greater effect when different faith groups cooperate. Link with another local faith community to work together on a topical issue that affects everyone e.g. Safer Neighbourhoods. Alternatively, take turns to have coffee mornings on neutral territory in a community hall, attend each other's open days etc. to foster better community relations and pave the way for future joint action.

Questions for discussion

- What is the role of establishing and maintaining borders? Is it to keep people in or out? Why are border controls on *people* considered so important when money and materials moves across borders quite freely?
- What distinctions are we making both legally and in terms of attitudes when we call some people “refugees” and others “asylum seekers”? How fair are these distinctions?
- What do you feel are the implications of describing some asylum seekers as “failed”? What would be a more just and compassionate way of speaking?
- As local congregations, no matter how warmly we welcome those who come to us, how actively do we *search* for those in need? Do you think we should?
- Given that refugees are marginal to society, where is God in the life of the refugee? How should this perspective affect our attitudes to the issue?
- Would your church give sanctuary to an asylum seeker facing deportation? What do you imagine would be some of the issues to be considered if this became a possibility?

Chef's specials

Challenges for response by the congregation

Consider the issue of sanctuary for asylum seekers and how it could relate to your church. Look at the CTBI publication *Sanctuary* to learn more about the challenges and implications of this specialized work.

Learn another language to enable better communication with those who are far from home and in need of friendship. Perhaps begin a language exchange with a local refugee community – they teach you their language; in return you support them in learning English

Your local law centre advising refugees or another or the refugee support agencies may need volunteers. How could your church give support?

Find out who is your local community development worker dealing with refugees – how could the church get more involved?

Perhaps you feel public opinion is unsympathetic towards refugees. Look for ways of campaigning in the local community for a more open attitude towards asylum seekers and other refugee migrants.

Given that armed conflict and poverty are two major factors that lead people to take refuge, find ways for your church to become more active in campaigning on the role that rich nations play in perpetuating these injustices