

World Focus for March

Refugees and Other Displaced Persons

Distribution:

Please can the whole file be sent to service leaders, preachers and intercessors.

Introduction:

A new World Focus title for us, although not a new topic.

Why is the title worded as it is? For our purposes here, a refugee is someone who has been forced to leave their country due to conflict, natural disaster or intense persecution because of their ethnicity, colour, religion or another aspect of their identity. The term Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is applied to those forced to leave their home but who remain within their own country.

The global scale of forcible displacement is hard to grasp. (If you dislike statistics then skip to the next paragraph.) The UN statistics for the end of 2015 gave a worldwide assessment of 21 million refugees and 44 million IDPs, a total of 65 million displaced people.¹ This is equivalent to one in every 113 human beings. The UN estimated that 34,000 people were being displaced every day, approximately 24 every minute.

The number of Biblical characters who experienced forcible displacement is high. The following is a partial list: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph (trafficked to Egypt), Moses, Naomi, David, Daniel, Joseph with Mary and Jesus, Paul. There are numerous others. Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden by God, whose next act was to meet with them on the other side of the fence. It is the first glimpse in Scripture that God is with people when they are displaced.

Likewise today, God is meeting people on the move. There are copious stories of people finding faith in Jesus in camps, in deserts, on trucks, or whose prayers for deliverance when boats flounder is part of their journey to faith. In many places, God's people, the Church, are acting with generosity, compassion, wisdom and transparency to meet the needs of the displaced. Immediate needs include shelter, food, health care and post trauma support. Longer term needs include education for children, employment opportunities, assistance in starting new businesses and proper infrastructure as camps become de facto towns.

Christians are also active in many areas endeavouring to change the conversation and language surrounding forcibly displaced people. We need to be trendsetters in being welcoming, hospitable and inclusive of people, as well as hot on the injustice underlying many of the causes of displacement. In addition, keep being positive about the opportunities for the Gospel. The displaced need welcome, acceptance, healing, a sense of peace and hope, acknowledgement that injustice has been done and to know there is a model of forgiveness. Sharing the hope of Jesus can provide all of these.

If you have questions or would like clarifications then please contact Ian Davies on 861293 or email IanDavies@pobox.com or Scott Sissons, scottsissons@sky.com

¹ UNHCR; <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed 21st February 2017)

PS. I regard positive discrimination in favour of Christians in refugee systems as totally inappropriate. Middle Eastern church leaders point out that many of the challenges they face are rooted in religious discrimination. Seeing the same applied elsewhere reinforces this practice, making their situation worse. Their request is to enable people to stay, not assist their leaving. This is tempered by pastoral understanding of those that do choose to leave. Equally, enable Christians to stay is easy to say and invites the question of how. I have a somewhat lengthy answer, one element of which is to remember that we follow a suffering saviour who calls us to be like him.

Prayer meeting:

My suggestion for the Whole Church Prayer meeting on 6th March would be to focus on Sanctuary Sunday.

Intercessions on Sundays:

Please use a selection of the following.

Refugees and Other Displaced Persons:

- For effective action to address the causes of displacement, including conflicts, oppression, poor governance, ineffective support for those affected by natural disasters or simply changing patterns of agriculture
- For effective international support to those countries hosting large numbers of displaced people; the UN's top six are Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia & Jordan. Iraq would be included if they included IDPs.
- Pray for Christians worldwide to be actively engaged in providing humanitarian assistance to all in need

Specific Mission Partner: Bible Society – Bible-based trauma healing programme

- “Volunteers in local churches are trained as group facilitators and participants use a workbook in their language. Content is based on the Bible. Refugees hear about God's care for them, and they start to find identity, meaning and hope in the story of God's love found in His word.” (Bible Society, UK, website)
- Pray that the Bible-based trauma healing resources will be widely used.
- Pray that those who participate will know the healing touch of Jesus

Specific Mission Partner: Corrie Sissons, with Oxfam's Global Humanitarian Team

- At the time of writing, she was travelling to Nairobi to do assessments on severe humanitarian situations in parts of Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa

Other Mission Partners (local as well as global):

- For Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees
- STAR (Student Action for Refugees) at the University of Gloucester – for the committee as it seeks to establish this new body and agrees what actions to pursue
- For GARAS – Gloucestershire Action for Refugee and Asylum Seekers (website link below)
- For effective support of those in our communities that are in need or practical support

Following Jesus Christ and sharing His hope:

- That forcibly displaced people would recognise that Jesus is with them on the journey; pray that those who seek truth and peace will find it in Jesus; pray that they will be able to worship with other followers of Jesus

Useful links:

GARAS: <http://www.garas.org.uk/>

Bible Society: UK: www.biblesociety.org.uk/

Egypt: www.dareketab.org/bs3/en/default.aspx

Open the Book: www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/

Youth for Christ: UK: <https://yfc.uk/>

Local: www.yfcgloucestershire.co.uk/

The Rock: www.therock.uk.com/

Mandritsara - Mat & Katy Linley: mandritsara.org.uk/

Kagando: Friends of Kagando: www.friendsofkagando.org.uk/

TEAR Fund: www.tearfund.org/

Corrie Sissons: www.oxfam.org.uk/

Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>