
As We Prepare for Worship [slide 1]

"Nobody chooses to be a refugee... It takes a lot to decide to leave your own country and look for a better life. Besides the name refugee, we are all just human beings. People just want peace. I just hope that someday people will understand."

~ Peace Izabayo, who fled home for the first time when she was in second grade, in an interview with Refugees International

Gathering Song [slide 2]

"God Welcomes All" #399

Gathering Words [slides 3-5]

from John 10

Jesus says: I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. The sheep hear my voice. I call to my sheep and lead them out.

We are sheep of the fold. We follow because we know Jesus' voice.

Jesus also says: I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

We welcome all the sheep that Jesus calls.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Jesus has gathered us as one to worship.

Song [slides 6-11]

"How Big Are Your Arms, O God?"

Welcome [slide 12 - blank]

On this Lord's Day, we celebrate the love of God. We have been gathered here in God's love. We were created in love.

When God first called us, it was in the midst of the perfection of creation. The world God created was beautiful, diverse, and self-renewing. God created

- [slide 13] the division of time into night and day;
- [slide 14] the division of earth between land and sea;
- [slide 15] divisions in the animals between fish, birds, and livestock.

All of this a manifestation of God's love.

Out of love and in God's own image, humanity was created. [slide 16] Yes, there are differences in our physical bodies, languages, and cultures, but it is really as one that God created us. It was to all humanity that God charged us to care for the world.

But despite the division and diversity in creation and humanity, God did not divide the world into parts. For just as humanity is one, so is creation. But to make sense of space and recognize diversity, humans created borders and all the good and bad that go with them. But even as we do this,

**The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.¹**

We are called to remember our common humanity as those created in the image of God, living in the world God created. Today, we will consider a biblical view of refugees.

[slide 17] We often use the words refugee, asylum seeker, and immigrant interchangeably, but each term represents a different class of immigrant.

In addition to the information included in the bulletin, we'd like to show you this short video that explains who a refugee is and the process of becoming a resettled refugee. The video was created for San Diego County in 2106, but the process remains the same today.

Video Refugee 101² [slide 18 – video will automatically begin playing]

Here in Milwaukee, the International Institute of Wisconsin, or IIW, is a resettlement organization who meets those refugees at the airport and helps them assimilate into our communities. IIW's goal is to help individuals and families obtain self-sufficiency and promote multi-cultural understanding within the community.

Today is not a discussion of border policy or citizenship laws. Today, on the Lord's Day, we seek to understand who the refugee is and what that means to us as a people of faith.

Throughout this service, we will be sharing the stories of refugees, biblically and in today's world. We invite you to hear the story of God's people...

¹ Psalm 24:1 (NRSV)

² <https://youtu.be/96UmgY6E8n8>

Instrumental Interlude #1 [slide 20]

"Guide My Feet"

Tableau Reading from the Old Testament

Exodus 1 (CEB)

[slide 21]

8 Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. ¹³ So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. ¹⁴ They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work. (ding)

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and [aid them in childbirth], if it is a boy, [you must] kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." (ding)

Even the Hebrew midwives were under strict orders.

17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹(ding)

8 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." (ding)

20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. (ding)

22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

After generations of oppression and slavery, God called Moses to lead them out of Egypt. The people became refugees in the wilderness for 40 years. (ding)

Instrumental Interlude #2 [slide 22]

"We are One in the Spirit", Verse

Our Refugee Story - A Mother's Story [slide 23 - Yemen]

When I think of home, I want to cry. Even after all these years, I can see it so clearly. My family had never traveled far from my hometown, and my life was full of aunts and uncles and cousins. I felt blessed to give my children the same childhood I had. It was our "best life."

I guess we should have expected it, but the war still seemed to come from nowhere. At first, it was distant, and we could forget about it in our daily life. But then, it became our daily life.

It was not safe for the children to be alone in the streets. Soon, it was not safe for my husband and oldest son to go to work. Either the government or the militia were questioning all of the men. Sometimes they would disappear – either for questioning or drafted into the war. We began to fear our home would no longer be safe.

Instrumental #3 [slide 24]

"We are One in the Spirit" Refrain

Video - One Second Per Day³ [slide 25 - video will begin automatically]

People don't expect to become refugees. The following video was modeled after the "one second everyday" campaign where people chronicle their lives by taking a one second video each day. The video was created to increase awareness of the refugee crisis in Syria.

Choral Anthem [slide 26 - Kosovo]

"Prayer of the Children"

Our Refugee Story - A Mother's Story [slide 27-Turkey]

I praised God when we made it to the refugee camp. If you saw it, you might wonder why. There were too many people and not enough housing, food, or medicine. Many of the latrines were simply open pits; the stench was unbearable. But I was thankful.

When the war came to our neighborhood and our house was destroyed we left in terror. We had nothing but the clothes we were wearing and the few things we grabbed before running to the basement. We were in the dark listening to the pounding of the bombs when our house was hit. Suddenly, darkness turned to light as our house collapsed.

As my world collapsed.

I struggled to find my husband and children. I clawed at the rubble praying that my family was still alive. My husband told me later I was screaming. We located each of our children. Our oldest and youngest were together, dead.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBQ-1oHfimQ&feature=youtu.be>

My other daughter was covered with blood. My husband picked her up in his arms as I grabbed my younger son's hand. We ran to the hospital, but it was chaos. A medic stitched my daughter's head wound and the bleeding stopped. But we couldn't stay there.

Our country was no longer our home. We fled for the border. Both the government and the militia had checkpoints set up at every major crossroads. Every time my heart felt like it would explode as I waited to see if we could pass. At one stop, the guards pulled us aside and then sent our daughter on alone – alone and still in shock from her wound and all that had happened. I didn't think we would see her again. I didn't think I could bear it.

It was after midnight the night after the attack that we arrived at the border. We found our daughter in the medical tent of the refugee camp. As I said, I praised God that we were there.

Song [slide 28]

"God, How Can We Comprehend?", v.1

Pyramid Prayer – A Prayer for Healing [slides 29-33]

There are many reasons people flee their homes and countries – all of them out of their control. Let us lift up to the Lord the things that seek to destroy.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

God of creation, for the flood, storm, fire, drought, and earthquake that increasingly devastate the earth, we pray:

Give us the wisdom and will to make the necessary changes so that we do not feed their fury. May we respond with compassion to those devastated in the aftermath.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

God of peace, for the violence in our homes, cities, countries, and world, we pray:

May we embody the ways of peace in our relationships and the courage to act out in ways of peace in our communities.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

God of love, for the hatred that stems out of religion, we pray:

Let us choose to welcome as Christ welcomed us, even to those we do not understand or who would not welcome us in return.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

God of unity, for the racism and nationalism that drives marginalization and genocide, we pray:

Teach us, O God, that you created the world with the beauty of diversity. Let us see one another as you see us. For the things we cannot change, let us bear one another up. For the things that we can change, may love be our guide.

Lord of the nations, heal us.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

Amen.

A Reading from the Psalms [slide 34]

Psalm 137:1-4 (NRSV)

A reading from the Psalms as the Israelites were in exile in Babylon.

- 1 By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
- 2 On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
- 3 For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
- 4 How could we sing the LORD’S song
in a foreign land?

Our Refugee Story - A Father’s Story [slide 35 - Algeria]

Mother

My husband has built a little garden next to our tent. I never thought we would be here long enough plant a garden, but this is our second harvest.

Father

This is not how I planned for my family to live. We waited to marry until I could support us. I built the addition on my parents’ house with my own hands after a full

day's work so that we could make a home together. I was so proud when I carried my wife over the threshold. I vowed to protect her and provide for our family.

I feel that I have failed. Two of my children are dead, and the other two are always sick with whatever is going around the refugee camp. As I work this dusty patch of earth to supplement our meals, to provide something fresh for them to eat, the shame is overwhelming.

I want to do something – I would do anything – for my family. I make sure we have our water and food rations. But for the most part, my days are spent with other men remembering the past and hoping that we will be able to return to our homes.

Mother

But even if we are able to go back, what will we find? I saw the destruction in the light of the explosions. I don't know that home exists anymore.

Scripture in Song [slides 36-38]

Psalm 13

How Long, O Lord?"

Our Refugee Story - A Mother's Story [slide 39 - Kenya]

We have been here five years. How much longer? Five, ten, fifty years more? It seems that this war will never end. But this is not a life for our family. Our children need a future that is more than this.

I watch my children grow.

daughter enters

My daughter is taller than me now. My daughter dreamed of going to university. The children attend "school" in the refugee camp, but many kids do not go. They don't see the point if they are going to spend the rest of their lives here.

son enters

My son is growing quickly, too. I remember how he used to sit on the front steps every day waiting for his brother and sister to come home. They would bring their friends and play soccer in street in front of our house. I can still hear their laughter.

My husband and I have been discussing for months whether we should apply for resettlement. If we don't go, our children have no future.

children exit

If we do go, we will probably never see our family or home again. How do we decide? What is best for our children? Will this refugee camp always be our home?

Scripture in Song [slides 40-42]

Psalm 139

"O God, You Search Me" 29, vv. 2-4

Our Refugee Story - A Family's Story [slide 43 - process]

Mother

The process for resettlement seems unending. I have lost count of how many interviews we have done and people we have talked to.

Father

I have a new job. My profession has become the resettlement process. It is a full-time job to keep our paperwork together and get everyone to their interviews.

Each family member needed to fill out a detailed application and include passport info, photos, and two other copies of identification. We also had to write a declaration explaining why we are afraid to return to our country, including specific dates and instances, declarations from friends who witnessed how we were harmed, and a declaration from our psychological evaluation. The list goes on and on.

Our hope has been placed in people we have never met. This is the most difficult thing I've ever done.

Daughter

There is new life in our family with the excitement of a life outside this refugee camp with a home and school. I barely remember living in our old house, having a room of my own, and attending school every day. I've spent so much of my life here. I dream of having my own home again. I dream of friends. I dream.

Son

My mother says we will be leaving the refugee camp soon. I don't know how I feel about this. This is the only home I've really ever known.

Mother

I don't know if I dare to hope that one day our name will be called. How do you hope for the unknown? But we know here is not the end of our story. This will not always be our home.

Instrumental #4 [slide 44]

"God How Can We Comprehend?"

A Reading from the Psalms [slides 45-46]

Psalms 136:1-3, 23-26 (NRSV)

The psalmist reminds us that despite our changing circumstances or seemingly unending struggle, God's steadfast love endures.

O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good,
O give thanks to the God of gods,
O give thanks to the Lord of lords,

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

It is God who remembered us in our low estate,
and rescued us from our foes,
who gives food to all flesh,

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the God of heaven,

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

Our Refugee Story - A Mother's Story [slide 47-Myanmar]

We have been notified that we will be leaving next week. We are going to a place called Milwaukee in the United States. We've been told that there are others from our homeland there. Maybe there will even be people from my hometown. Maybe some of our family.

What do I take from this place that has been our home for the last ten years? How do I pack up our family, our homeland, our history? What do I want our children to remember? What does God have prepared for us?

Maybe this will be our "best life" yet.

Instrumental #5 [slide 48]

"Guide My Feet"

Communion [slide 49 - tables]

Welcome

The writer of Hebrews tells us that even as Abraham and Sarah lived in the Promised Land, they did so as a stranger. They lived in tents, a nomadic life, often uprooted by those who controlled the land. But all the while, they lived by faith.

For [they were] looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.⁴

In 2019, the United Nations estimated there were over 70 million people who had been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of these, nearly 26 million are classified as refugees. They want the same thing for their families as we do: health, safety, education, opportunity.

Last year, for 92,400 of the nearly 26 million refugees, their hopes became a reality. They were approved for resettlement in another country and a new chance at life.

From the beginning, God recognized that people would be forced to leave their homes and live in a new land. Time and again, the Bible tells us that God's people were strangers in other lands. We are reminded that

God executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.⁵

Let us offer our prayers of thanksgiving to the God who loves.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of all creation, you formed us in your own image, giving us life with your very breath. You told us to go forth and multiply, and we have. In every corner of the world, humanity has grown into a beautiful diversity that mirrors the whole of your creation. We are different, yet the same – and you love us all.

Jesus, you put on humanity in the form of a Palestinian Jew. You walked in a land that is not familiar to us, with customs that we do not always understand. But you lived and spoke the common language of love and community. Through you, we are gathered as your Body. In love, you made us one despite our differences.

If no communion. Holy Spirit, you continue to hold us together. You nudge and lead us to clearer vision and open hearts. Lead us in the ways of love. We join our voices as one voice, praying the words we find most familiar, saying: Our Father...

⁴ Hebrews 11:10 (NV)

⁵ Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (NRSV)

If communion: Holy Spirit, you continue to hold us together. You nudge and lead us to clearer vision and open hearts. Lead us in the ways of love. Holy Spirit, we also ask that in your presence with us today, you make this simple cup and loaf a feast of love. May the power of the Risen Lord be tangible among us as we commune together. We join our voices as one voice, praying the words we find most familiar, saying: Our Father....

Invitation

We come as a people who come from homes with a floor, roof, and walls; running water and heat; the freedom to make choices about our lives. But as we come to this table, we also come as foreigners. For we, too, look forward to the city whose builder and architect is God.

Therefore, let us come acknowledging our common humanity. Let us come seeking the one who created us, saves us, and loves us. As we receive the bread that was broken, let us remember that Christ's body was broken for all. And as we receive the cup, let us remember that Christ's blood was shed for all.

This is the Lord's table, and it has been prepared for you – for every one of you. Come, one and all.

Prayer After Thanksgiving

from 1 John 4:7-19

Faithful and merciful God, strengthened at your table, we have learned what love is. Full of your love, we are able to love others in the same way. May the world see you in our love. Replace the fear within us with the fullness of your grace. May your grace be perfected in our words and actions. We love, because you first loved us. And in your love, we go out to love the world. Amen.

Choral Anthem

"For Everyone Born"

Our Refugee Story - A Mother's Story [slide 50 -airport]

It's been so long since I have had a chance to write in my diary. So much has happened in these last two years. Despite our fears, we made the right decision in applying for refugee status.

When we arrived in Milwaukee – even though it was the middle of the night – we were met at the airport by very friendly and helpful people from an organization called IIW. They helped us with everything! A place to live even with some furniture!

They provided food and basic necessities for us while we tried to find our way in our new home country.

My husband was able to find employment within weeks, as he already spoke a bit of English. The children are attending a very good neighborhood school and have friends and a bedroom again! It has been a long journey, but I am happy to say that we are on the path to our new "Best Life."

Offering [slide 51]

With this service and offering today, we are hoping to share information about refugees, ways we can volunteer to help their transition to a new life, as well as to raise funds to help IIW provide for all of those basic necessities of life!

In your bulletin and on posters around the sanctuary you will find a plethora of information, please take a moment to look it over. In 2018, less than 1% of refugees world-wide were accepted for resettlement. It is a very rigorous process.

The refugees that come to Milwaukee have fled the homes they love and have lived in a refugee camp for years. They arrive here with nothing but a dream and a wonderful group of people from IIW and to help them to resettle.

The range of resettlement services IIW provides to refugees include providing

- safe and secure living arrangements,
- basic necessities,
- links to resources to address their physical, medical, economic, and social needs, and
- cultural orientation.

[slide 52]

Integration into society is the overall goal of the IIW resettlement program, and they work diligently to help all of their clients achieve this goal. IIW receives some government funding per refugee, but this funding doesn't cover even some basic needs for resettlement. For these items, IIW has established an emergency fund.

Every dollar raised during these shelter services will provide for emergency needs of resettled refugees. Some of these needs are things as simple as setting up a phone, transportation to school or to a job interview; Medical Care, School Supplies, Loans for Security Deposits, and Education Expenses.

[slide 53]

In addition to the emergency fund, there are many ways to get involved. IIW welcomes assistance in providing home goods and furnishings for the refugees' homes. The link to these amazing opportunities also in your bulletin. We can all make a difference in the lives of these refugees as they leave their beloved homes and try to make a new 'Best Life' in this unknown country.

[slide 54]

Call to Offering

You are invited today to be a part of someone's new "Best Life" by supporting refugees that settle in the Milwaukee area. By donating to IIW, you are not only supporting the smiling faces that greet each refugee as they step foot off the plane into an unknown land, but the supplies needed to support them as they make Milwaukee their home. Your gifts will help to provide funds for emergency needs that most of us consider necessities in daily life. With gratitude for this amazing opportunity, let us offer the gifts of our lives to the Lord.

Offertory [slide 55]

"Halle Halle"

Doxology [slide 56]

"For Everyone Born" #300, Refrain

Prayer of Dedication [slide 57]

God of all people in all places, we offer these gifts to you as our participation in your love in the world. May they be used to your glory as a source of strength and hope for those who receive them. Amen.

Sending Hymn [slides 58-63]

"We are One in the Spirit" 300

Benediction

In our thoughts, words, and actions, let love guide us as we go out into the world. May both those the powerful and the powerless know the love of Jesus through us. In the unity of our Triune God: Lover, Beloved, and Love, let us be the same.

Postlude

"What the World Needs Now is Love"