2018 Peace Gathering Prayer Service

Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace

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| **Welcome** | |
| Leader: | This year, Pope Francis has chosen “Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace” as the theme for the World Day of Peace celebration. Our gathering today will focus on stories of refugees: a girl from Syria, another girl from Nigeria and aid workers from around the world. |
| **Opening Song:** MI #415 All Are Welcome, verses 1, 4, 5 | |
| **Syria** | |
| Reader 1: | **For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matthew 25:35)** |
| Reader 2: | With more than 65 million people displaced around the world, we are faced with the worst refugee crisis in history. War, conflict, climate change, and poverty force more and more people to flee their homes every day.  The scope of the refugee crisis is truly a global one. Since the civil war in Syria began in 2011, more than 5 million people have left Syria for neighboring countries. In East Africa, drought and conflict have forced millions to leave their homes in search of safety, food, and water. Refugees spend years –sometimes decades – before they are able to return home, if they can return at all. |
| Reader 3: | For many refugees, home is where they want to be. More than four years ago, 11-year-old Sakeena and her family fled Syria for Lebanon. The family of 11 has lived in a makeshift shelter in Lebanon’s remote Bekaa Valley ever since.  With her thick black hair pulled into a long ponytail, a bright pink T-shirt and multi-colored nail polish, Sakeena Mteir looks like your typical 11-year-old. And in some ways, she is. Turfa, Sakeena’s mother, hopes that her daughter will someday become a teacher. In the meantime, the family is focused on day-to-day survival.  Turfa knows what she wants for the future. “If God let the war end tomorrow,” she says, “we would walk barefoot back home.”  *Short Pause for Reflection* |
| Reader 4: | That refugees around the world may find justice where they seek refuge and peace in their homeland, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That our ears will no longer turn deaf to the voices of refugees, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That our eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a threat, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That our tongues will not be silenced but will instead advocate, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That our hands will reach out to protect refugees in their travels, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer  Short pause for reflection |
| Leader: | Let us pray |
| All: | O God, the numbers seem overwhelming at times, but you know each individual refugee by name. Each person bears your image. Each child is loved by you. Open our eyes to their need and their potential. Soften our hearts to their suffering. Move us to action in ways that honor the love and compassion you have for each refugee. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.  *Pause for Reflection* |
| **Nigeria** | |
| Reader 1: | Psalm 140:1-2 Rescue me, Lord, from evildoers; protect me from the violent, who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. |
| Reader 2: | In 2004, 276 girls were abducted from their school in Chibok, a town in northeastern Nigeria, spawning the viral hashtag #BringBackOurGirls and bringing the extremist group, Boko Haram, into the global spotlight.  Unfortunately, the larger conflict and humanitarian crisis in this region of West Africa doesn’t get nearly as much attention. In western Africa, violence among insurgents and extremists has displaced three million people – including 1.4 million children. Children like Baraka. |
| Reader 5: | Baraka was 11 when her Nigerian village was attacked and her community held captive by a militant group. After a day in captivity, she, her sisters and her mother were able to escape. But they didn’t feel safe anywhere nearby.  They paid a truck driver to take them to a refugee camp in neighboring Niger, where things were more stable. It wasn’t until months later that her father and brothers escaped and her family was reunited.  They’ve lived in a refugee camp for two years.  Many people, like Baraka, have fled from Nigeria into the brutally dry and harsh region around Lake Chad where the borders of Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria all meet.  This massive, almost invisible, conflict has left more than 9 million people in need of urgent assistance and has forced the already poor citizens of Chad, Niger and Cameroon to host and care for the many tens of thousands of strangers arriving in their communities.  *Short Pause for Reflection* |
| Reader 4: | That innocent civilians are protected from the violence in their region, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That those who are fleeing will find refuge in places where they can access food, water, shelter and opportunity for themselves and their children, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | That the violence ends so that people can return to their homes and live in peace |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer  Short Pause for Reflection |
| Leader: | Let us pray |
| All: | O God, we don’t always see it when people suffer around the world.  But you do. Even the crises that are hidden and forgotten to us are on your mind. Lord, please protect families and communities in Nigeria from conflict and violence, as well as other countries around the world. As they flee, guide them to safe places and provide for their needs.  Most importantly, bring peace to their country. End the violence and allow them to rebuild their lives and care for their families and communities. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen  *Pause for Reflection* |
| **Those who Host Refugees** | |
| Reader 2: | All around the world, there are stories of small countries and ordinary people stepping out of their comfort zones to welcome refugees however they are able – in some cases, at great sacrifice. |
| Reader 6: | Maja, the Slovenia country director of a major humanitarian organization, was enjoying a post-church lunch with friends when she received the phone call: “Get prepared. There are several thousand refugees approaching the Slovenian border.” A few hours later, she was among those who welcomed the first refugees into this tiny country of only two million people.  She says: “During my months of working with refugees, I have not encountered even one for whom Jesus didn’t die – no matter how dirty, scared, cold, hungry, smelly, mocked, [sick](http://www.prayforrefugees.com/uncategorized/day-six-praying-for-those-hosting-refugees/), small, or badly treated they were.” |
| Reader 7: | Lebanon, a country of only 4 million people, has registered more than a million Syrian refugees, straining the small nation’s social services and infrastructure. |
| Reader 8: | In Uganda, which struggles with poverty among its own people, South Sudanese refugees are given land and the opportunity to work – a chance to really build a life for themselves. |
| Reader 9: | A tour guide in Athens, Greece saw more and more refugees arriving every week, and suggested to her husband they offer their garden guesthouse to a refugee family.  “I think everybody must think, it could be ourselves in this situation,” she said. “I don’t believe that private actions can solve the problem, but I think maybe if we are each able to change even one life, that is a lot.” |
| Reader 10: | An American pastor was approached about a group of 13 recently resettled refugees from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC seeking a church. None of the refugees speak English, but they are still regular church attendees, and the church has gone out of its way to help them adjust to their new life.  “I always thought of refugees as somebody outside of this country,” Pastor Ebenezer Samuel said. “But they are here and I’m thankful to God for bringing them to us. Through the love the church can show we hope they feel like part of a greater family now.”  *Short Pause for Reflection* |
| Reader 4: | For those following Christ’s example of compassionate service by welcoming refugees and helping them rebuild their lives, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | For those opening their homes, communities and countries – even when their own resources are scarce – to welcome those fleeing conflict and persecution, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer |
| Reader 4: | For those who may be struggling to overcome their fear of foreigners, that they will open their hearts to God’s calling and find the courage to live out their faith, we pray |
| All: | Loving God, hear our prayer  *Short Pause for Reflection* |
| Leader: | Let us pray |
| All: | O God, we live in challenging times full of fear and uncertainty. Help us to trust in you and follow your example of mercy and love. Guide us in our efforts to love our neighbor, so that when we meet in heaven we shall hear you say, “I was a stranger, and you invited me in.” We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. |
| **Reading from Pope Francis’ 2018 World Day of Peace Message** | |
| Reader 11: | When we turn [our contemplative] gaze to migrants and refugees, we discover that they do not arrive emptyhanded. They bring their courage, skills, energy and aspirations, as well as the treasures of their own cultures; and in this way, they enrich the lives of the nations that receive them. We also come to see the creativity, tenacity and spirit of sacrifice of the countless individuals, families and communities around the world who open their doors and hearts to migrants and refugees, even where resources are scarce. …  Those who see things in this way will be able to recognize the seeds of peace that are already sprouting and nurture their growth. Our cities, often divided and polarized by conflicts regarding the presence of migrants and refugees, will thus turn into workshops of peace.  *Short pause for Reflection* |
| Optional Video | Greece: Embracing Refugees in a Time of Crisis (The Beauty of Serving)  17 Years is Too Many to Lose  Holy Family in Midst of Refugee Crisis |
| **Peacemaker Pledge** | |
| Leader: | In his World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis outlines four actions that are necessary to bring peace to asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and victims of human trafficking: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating. Please spend a few moments now reflecting on which of these actions you would be willing to commit yourself to, in the coming year. Please fill out the pledge card, sign and date it, and take it with you tonight. You might wish to put it in your prayer corner. |
| **Closing Prayer:** A Moment for Grace: A Prayer for Refugees | |
| Leader: | Let us pray |
| All: | God of our Wandering Ancestors,  Long have we known  That your heart is with the refugee:  That you were born into time  In a family of refugees  Fleeing violence in their homeland,  Who then gathered up their hungry child  And fled into alien country.  Their cry, your cry, resounds through the ages: “Will you let me in?”  Give us hearts that break open  When our brothers and sisters turn to us with that same cry.  Then surely all these things will follow:  Ears will no longer turn deaf to their voices.  Eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a threat.  Tongues will not be silenced but will instead advocate.  And hands will reach out— working for peace in their homeland,  working for justice in the lands where they seek safe haven.  Lord, protect all refugees in their travels.  May they find a friend in me  And so make me worthy  Of the refuge I have found in you. Amen |
| **Closing Song:** MI #526 Let There Be Peace on Earth | |
| **Leader:** | Let us offer each other a Sign of Peace |

Stories and prayers adapted from Catholic Relief Services materials.