



Presbyterian Mission
Compassion, Peace & Justice

WE CHOOSE WELCOME: ACTION GUIDE 2020



Over 70.8 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of famine, conflict and persecution. This is the highest recorded number of displaced individuals since WWII. While the U.S. has historically admitted more refugees than all other countries combined, recent xenophobia and policy changes have decreased the number of asylum seekers allowed into the country. A 2017 ban has halted refugee resettlement and travel from several Muslim-majority countries. In 2018, the current administration ordered immigration courts to refuse asylum status for those fleeing gang or domestic violence. The 2019 "Return to Mexico" policy forces refugees seeking asylum at the Southern U.S. border to remain in Mexico, often without access to legal aid.

The PC(USA)'s support for refugee resettlement began during the refugee crisis of World War II. The 160th General Assembly (1948) stated, "The United States should pass legislation to bring in at least four hundred thousand displaced persons during the next four years. ... As they arrive, our church people should stand ready to open their homes and provide work for these unfortunate victims of war." We continue this tradition and welcome refugees in the current day.

We are inviting Presbyterians around the nation to extend biblical hospitality and stand in solidarity with our refugee neighbors through the "We Choose Welcome" campaign. Here is how you and your congregation can get started!

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WHEN WE CHOOSE TO WELCOME, WE COMMIT TO:

ALWAYS BE LEARNING

It is our responsibility to educate ourselves and our congregations about the experiences and traditions of people who have been pushed to the margins in our community.

PRACTICE SOLIDARITY

As our neighbors face increasing challenges from our policies and in our communities, we commit to fighting for justice and dignity alongside them every step of the way.

USE RESOURCES FOR JUSTICE

We will use the power and resources we have available to advocate, in partnership with our neighbors, for safe and just outcomes

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

We will build relationships based on mutual benefit and respect with organizations led by people directly impacted by issues we are working on.

RESPECT AGENCY

We need to honor the dignity and decision-making power of marginalized people and follow their leadership by never doing for others what they can and would for themselves.

FIRST STEPS

CONGREGATIONAL EDUCATION

- 1 To increase your understanding of the crisis, offer congregational education on the political forces that lead refugees to leave home, Muslim faith principles and the U.S. policies that create migration crises.

REACH OUT TO PARTNERS

- 2 Reach out to partner with an organization that is led directly by impacted people. You should always be doing this work in partnership with refugees.

CREATE A TEAM

- 3 Create a dedicated team in your congregation to do this work. Seek out like-minded people who are interested in continually welcoming refugees and pushing your congregation to take this on.

RECOGNIZE THE POWER DYNAMIC

- 4 Recognize that there is a power dynamic between people who are serving and people who are being served. Ask yourself, "How can I serve with refugees, rather than for them?"

MAKE A COMMITMENT

- 5 Choosing welcome should not just be about one event. It should be about building long-term relationships with other people in your community. As you go about this work, always think about how you can follow up after each event or action, how these efforts can be more sustainable and what your long-term visions are.

Background & FAQs

GENERAL

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES COMING TO THE U.S.?

Refugees and asylees are people who have fled their country of origin as a result of persecution or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

Refugees and asylees are differentiated by where they apply. [Refugees apply](#), before entering the U.S., go through a rigorous screening process overseas, and enter the U.S. once approved. [Asylees first make it to the U.S.](#), then upon arrival, apply for protection from persecution and begin the screening process. Both are legal pathways to seek refuge in the U.S. Read more about the refugee resettlement process at the [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance site](#).

WHAT RIGHTS ARE GUARANTEED TO ASYLEES?

Upon entering a country and declaring they are seeking asylum, [asylees are allowed](#) to apply for a Social Security Card, petition to bring family members to the U.S., petition to travel overseas, and are protected from being returned to their home countries. After one year, asylees may apply to become permanent residents of the United States, and can apply for citizenship after an additional four years.

WHY SHOULD WE LET REFUGEES INTO OUR COUNTRY?

As Christians, we have the moral obligation to welcome the stranger, particularly those fleeing persecution. Thousands of Jewish children perished in the Holocaust because the [U.S. denied them entry](#). This is a humanitarian tragedy that should not be replicated in the 21st century.

Humanitarian actions also serve our national security interest. Large influxes of refugees into neighboring countries can lead to further regional unrest; resettling refugees in the U.S. can help prevent further unrest. Refugees also bolster local economies by bringing labor and expertise. Read more about the contributions of refugees [here](#).

WHAT ARE "CLIMATE REFUGEES"?

The term "climate refugee" is a bit misleading. While not recognized as a legal criteria for refugee recognition, climate change is certainly a significant factor or root cause of forced displacement today. The effects of climate change are [threatening vulnerable populations across the world](#). Changes to the climate has led to food and water insecurity, and island nations are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels. The current definition of a refugee means that people displaced by climate change often go without the legal protections offered to refugees.

REGIONAL & COUNTRY QUESTIONS

WHY ARE SO MANY REFUGEES COMING FROM CENTRAL AMERICA RIGHT NOW?

The Northern Triangle of Central America (NTAC), consisting of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, is [one of the most violent regions in the world](#). According to a Doctors Without Borders [survey](#), many people fleeing NTAC cited blackmail, extortion, gang violence, and threats to their lives as reasons for leaving their homes. As a direct result of this incredible danger, neighboring countries have seen a [432% increase in asylum applications](#).

While many people in Central America may be coming to the U.S. for economic opportunity, a [vast majority of families](#) that seek to cross the border are from the NTAC region. Migration from countries with lower rates of violence is actually [decreasing](#), suggesting that these people are fleeing violent threats.

WHAT IS THE "REMAIN IN MEXICO" POLICY?

The Migrant Protection Protocol of 2019 (MPP, also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy) [forces asylum seekers to stay in Mexico](#) while they await their court hearings in the U.S.. This policy not only goes against international protocol, but puts asylum seekers at great risk. Despite the many new camps and shelters created in Mexico, asylum seekers waiting at the border face [hunger, homelessness, physical attacks, and even kidnapping](#). When they do go to court, it is usually without legal counsel.

WHAT IS CAUSING MASS MIGRATION FROM CAMEROON?

Cameroon used to be one of the most [refugee-friendly countries](#) in the world. Nonviolent protests from the English-speaking minority began in 2016, with protestors claiming they were [disadvantaged by a political and educational system that favored the French-speaking majority](#). When the government responded to these protests with violence, armed separatist groups rose up with the intent to declare an independent state. Since then, [over 950,000 people](#) have been displaced from their homes in Cameroon.

REFUGEES & COVID-19

As of March 2020, the CDC ordered a restriction on border crossings to control the spread of COVID-19, banning all entry without documentation. This order has effectively [ended asylum for all new arrivals](#), regardless of country of origin or exposure to COVID-19. With court dates delayed due to the virus, an estimated 64,000 asylum seekers are waiting in limbo at the U.S.-Mexico border. This overcrowding not only leaves asylum seekers [vulnerable to the very violence](#) they are trying to escape, but more vulnerable to COVID-19, as social distancing in crowded encampments is [nearly impossible](#).

"In Matthew 25, we are asked to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide shelter to the homeless. We, as Presbyterians, have faithfully engaged in this work as we have resettled countless individuals and families.

We choose welcome."

*- Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly*



PC(USA) SOCIAL WITNESS POLICY AND STATEMENTS BY STATED CLERK

The PC(USA) has been explicit about our moral obligation to advocate for the entry and integration of refugees in our country and to resist any form of anti-Muslim sentiment in our congregations and communities. See our recent statements below:

- 2019:** [Stated Clerk sends letters to Congress urging for protection of migrant families](#)
- 2018:** 223rd General Assembly Statements on: [Syria, Israel & Palestine, North Korea, Central America, South Sudan](#)
[Stated Clerk Urges U.S. Leaders to Take New Approach with Migrants](#)
- 2017:** [Stated Clerk Opposes Order Banning Refugees' Entry into the U.S.](#)
- 2016:** The 222nd General Assembly: [On Responding to Our Sisters and Brothers Who are Refugees or Internally Displaced](#)
- 2015:** Stated Clerk: [Choose Welcome, Not Fear](#)

10 WAYS YOUR CONGREGATION CAN CHOOSE WELCOME DURING COVID-19

WHAT YOU CAN DO ONLINE, IN SMALL GROUPS, AND WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. HOST COMMUNITY EDUCATION EVENTS

Many people have misconceptions about refugees and the countries they come from. Refugees are not a monolithic group. They are from different continents, become displaced for many different reasons, belong to a variety of faiths, and carry rich cultures and histories. Host an online documentary screening, begin a book club, or create a Bible study to explore these topics.

2. SUPPORT REFUGEES IN DISMANTLING RACISM

While we seek to secure welcome and safety for refugees and asylum seekers, building safe and equitable communities in the U.S. is ongoing. In our outrage and remorse over the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many other Black lives, we know that people of color who are refugees and immigrants also need our support for racial justice and anti-racism. Connect with local refugee and immigrant-led groups to become an ally for their full inclusion.

3. INVITE A REFUGEE LEADER TO SPEAK

Give people with refugee experiences—whose voices are often shut out—the opportunity to speak to your congregation over Zoom or by allowing them to share their story through a church social media account.

4. OFFER YOUR SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Oftentimes, small grassroots organizations led by refugees face resource constraints. Although offering church facilities may not be an option during a public health crisis, you can help organizations in socially-distant ways. Offer to help with social media, transport goods, or introduce refugee organizations to other community leaders to help them build a network of supporters.

5. HOST A MULTI-FAITH VIGIL OR SERVICE

Religious holidays and services are a great opportunity for inter-religious learning and dialogue. Foster mutual understanding between Muslims, Christians, and people of other faith traditions by hosting a multi-faith vigil, holiday celebration, or prayer online for the conflicts, persecution, and other dangers that have led to mass displacement.

6. PARTNER TO SUPPORT RESETTLEMENT

Resettling to the U.S. is a resource-intensive process. Welcome refugees to your communities by providing for their financial and physical needs. Contact your local refugee resettlement agency and see how you can support refugee integration.

7. ACCOMPANY AN ASYLUM SEEKER

Individuals seeking asylum or facing deportation because of a lack of immigration solutions need physical, financial, emotional and spiritual support. You can form an "accompaniment team" to provide housing, food, access to legal services and more. Your actions can provide comfort and courage to those fighting for their lives in a complex court process. Acts of solidarity can make a difference in their court outcomes.

8. HOST CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS AND RIGHTS TRAININGS

Refugees adjusting to life in the U.S. often need education about how to be civically engaged. Muslim people in the U.S. particularly need to know their rights because of disproportionate profiling at airports, by the police, and by other citizens. Help spread this knowledge by doing civic engagement webinars and "know your rights" trainings in partnership with a local refugee community group.

9. ADVOCATE FOR GOOD POLICY

Legislation that would make life harder for refugees and put them under further scrutiny is constantly being introduced at local, state and federal levels. Help stop these unjust pieces of legislation from passing by mobilizing your communities to resist these laws and fight for ones that would welcome our refugee neighbors.

10. USE MEDIA TO AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE

A massive shift in the way the media portrays refugees is absolutely necessary to make refugees feel fully welcome. Instead of a narrative rooted in fear of "the other," we must highlight a narrative rooted in peace and love. The positive community contributions by refugees are often overlooked. Amplify this type of narrative by submitting op-eds to the local paper, promoting local refugee-led organizations and events, and utilizing social media to let people know where you stand, both as a Presbyterian and as a community member.

Additional Resources

ABOUT REFUGEES

FAQ on Refugee Resettlement

[Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#)

This page gives a brief overview of the refugee resettlement process in the U.S., explains eligibility, and lists suggestions for how churches can support resettlement.

Know Your Rights as a Refugee

[Church World Service, March 2017](#)

There has been a lot of confusion and fear about what rights refugees can access. The best way to protect yourself and those around you is by knowing your rights. Read this guide to find out more.

Resettlement and Processing Centers: Map and Contact List

[Refugee Processing Center](#)

Find a Refugee Resettlement Agency near you. These agencies can help connect you to resources to better understand and support your refugee neighbors.

Legislative Updates Regarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers

[Center for Migration Studies](#)

A regularly updated journal tracking proposed legislation regarding asylees and refugees.

TOOLKITS

Building Meaningful Contact: A How-To Guide

[Welcoming America](#)

This guide by Welcoming America and Welcoming Michigan details how to build successful contact in intercultural communities. It offers sample invitations and activities to help you facilitate your contact-building event. For more information about welcoming refugees in rural communities, see [this guide](#) from Welcoming America.

Reflection and Prayer for World Refugee Day

[PC\(USA\) Office of Immigration Issues and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly](#)

This resource includes Scripture, a theological reflection and prayer to guide you in observing World Refugee Day. Adapt this reflection piece to your congregational service or Bible study in honor of refugees.

Family-Friendly Education and Action Resource Guide

[Interfaith Immigration Coalition \(IIC\), 2020](#)

This document has testimonials, reflections, prayers, and images to help explain the asylum-seeking process and the current border crisis. IIC also recommends different types of actions that congregations can take to support refugees.

Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Companion Guide

[Presbyterian Mission](#)

From the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, this guide aims to assist congregations in their commitment to peacemaking in their local community and around the world. The guide offers reading and Bible study recommendations, identifies target areas for community engagement, and tips for how to be an effective advocate for change.

World Refugee Day 2020 - June 20th

[Refugee Council USA](#)

This toolkit includes an introduction describing the power of advocacy, a guide to local meetings with policymakers, information regarding how to create advocacy events, sample letters and other resources to help you ensure that your government is adopting refugee and Muslim-friendly policies. [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#) also lists many other resources compiled by its partners to help your congregation get started on welcoming refugees.

STORIES AND EXAMPLES

Curious about what others are doing in their communities? Many organizations have been collecting stories in the press about people of faith taking on the call to welcome refugees.

[Refugee Council \(USA\) State Refugee Profiles](#)

[Asylum Access - Refugee Stories](#)

[Stances and Statements from the Faith Community on COVID, Migration, and Refugees](#)

[Church World Service: 30 Ways to Care for Yourself, Others and Immigrants During COVID-19](#)

[#WeChooseWelcome Photo Album](#)

If you are viewing this in print, find the web version with active links at www.pcusa.org/welcome