

What Local Church Leaders Can Do



The most valuable thing the local church has to offer refugees and displaced people is a welcoming community. The role of the local church is to love and welcome the foreigners in our communities (see Deuteronomy 19:34 and Matthew 25: 34-36). Refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people are among the world's most vulnerable people. God calls us to seek their protection and welfare.

1. Get informed – refugee realities

Local church leaders need to be well-informed so that they can educate their congregations concerning forced displacement in the world today. Encourage your faith community to be informed as well.

Some good sources of up-to-date refugee related news and information include:

- International Association for Refugees: www.iafr.org/toolbox. This page includes helpful publications, documents and media presentations related to refugee realities in the world today as well as books, movies and links to help you learn more about the situation of forcibly displaced people.
- Follow IAFR's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/refugeeministry.
- The Refugee Highway Partnership (RHP) offers useful links and resources: www.refugeehighway.net.
- Go to the United National High Commissioner for Refugees' page for current news and statistics on forcibly displaced people around the world: www.unhcr.org.
- More helpful resources are available at www.wewelcomerefugees.com/resources.

2. Get informed – biblical perspective

From the deportation of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, to John's exile on the Island of Patmos, the biblical narrative is filled with stories of forced displacement. Church leaders can educate their faith community concerning the context of forced displacement in the texts from which they teach and preach. It is important for Christ-followers to see the pattern of God at work in the midst of forced displacement in Scripture, so that they anticipate him at work in today's refugee crises.

The following resources and many more are available at www.iafr.org/toolbox.

- *"An Introduction to the Refugee Highway"*, a 7 minute media presentation that explores current refugee realities and a biblical perspective of forced displacement.
- *"Refugees in the Bible"* highlights and quotes biblical texts related to forced displacement without commentary.
- *"Why Christians Care About Refugees?"*, a 1 page resource offering a biblical perspective.

Several thematic Bible reading plans are available at www.bible.com/search/plans?q=refugees. Use one of these plans or the Refugee Highway Map and discussion guide (www.iafr.org/toolbox) for a small group.

3. Invite a guest speaker

Another way local church leaders can better inform their congregations about refugee realities and our biblical mandate to love and welcome the foreigner is by inviting a guest speaker with expertise concerning these issues or a refugee Christian. If you don't know where to find such a speaker, IAFR is happy to help: email info@iafr.org.

4. Inform others

As you develop an informed understanding of refugee realities along with a deepening biblical perspective of forced displacement in the biblical narrative, be intentional about integrating this into your teaching. As a church leader, your words can help create space in the hearts of minds of people to welcome refugees.

World Refugee Sunday is an excellent opportunity to leverage within our faith communities. By observing World Refugee Sunday, we let the world's refugees know that the Church hasn't forgotten them. Every year, UNHCR calls upon the world to observe June 20th as World Refugee Day, during which many cities offer opportunities to demonstrate solidarity with forcibly displaced people. The World Evangelical Alliance (www.worldeaa.org) calls upon Christians

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everywhere to observe World Refugee Sunday on the Sunday before or after June 20th. The Refugee Highway Partnership offers resources to help churches observe this important day (www.refugeehighway.net).

5. Pray for Forcibly Displaced People

Local church leaders can encourage their faith communities to pray on behalf of the world's refugees. When breaking news includes mention of forcibly displaced people, we should include them in our prayers. See the resource titled "*10 Ways to Pray for Refugees*" available from www.iafr.org/toolbox.

6. Pray for opportunities to meet refugees and asylum-seekers

1 in every 113 people today are forcibly displaced. We shouldn't be surprised to find them in our daily life. Be intentional and keep your eyes open for refugees, immigrants and migrants during your daily routine, at work, school and church. Pray for opportunities to love refugees, immigrants and migrants in your community. Don't be surprised when God puts such opportunities in your path.

When you meet a refugee or asylum-seeker, ask them about their biggest challenges. Maybe they will tell you challenges with affordable housing or employment, and perhaps there is someone in your congregation who can help. Even if a local church cannot directly meet these needs, they can often refer refugees to services that might be able to help them.

Invite the refugees you meet to join you for a meal. If they invite you to their home make sure to accept their hospitality!

7. Partner with a refugee resettlement agency or an organization that supports asylum-seekers in your area

If you don't know how to connect to local resources, Sarah Miller (IAFR's US Director) may be able to help. Email sarah@iafr.org.

8. Include refugees in your church's missions focus

Churches can make a lasting difference by committing to long-term relationships and partnership along the refugee highway.

9. Attend a Refugee Highway Partnership roundtable for your region

Refugee Highway Partnership is a network of churches, organizations and Christians who are interested in refugees. The annual regional gatherings are great places to learn more about refugee ministry. Find information about the North American roundtable at www.rhpna.com.

10. Partner with IAFR

IAFR can provide training opportunities for your church or leadership team and connect you with local and international links to refugees. If you want to help, but you don't know where to start email us at info@iafr.org.

We welcome your prayer and financial support (www.iafr.org/donate). Explore other ways to partner with us at www.iafr.org/partner.