

# WE CHOOSE WELCOME ACTION GUIDE JUNE 2017

Over 60 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of famine, conflict, and persecution, the largest number since World War 2. At the same time, there is growing anti-Muslim and xenophobic sentiment in the US, underscored by a proposed ban that would halt refugee resettlement and travel from several Muslim-majority countries.

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’s how you and your congregation can get started!

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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### WHEN WE CHOOSE 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.

#### RESPECT AGENCY

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

#### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

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

#### 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 OUR 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.

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## FIRST STEPS

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### 1 CONGREGATIONAL EDUCATION

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

### 2 REACH OUT TO PARTNERS

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

### 3 CREATE A TEAM

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

### 4 RECOGNIZE POWER DYNAMIC

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

### 5 MAKE A COMMITMENT

Choosing welcome should not just be about one event. It should be about building long-term relationships with others 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.

# TEN WAYS YOUR CONGREGATION CAN CHOOSE WELCOME

## 1 HOST COMMUNITY EDUCATION EVENTS

Many 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 all carry rich culture and history. Host an event, dedicate a sermon, or create a Bible study to explore these topics.

## 3 INVITE A REFUGEE LEADER TO SPEAK

Give people with lived refugee experiences, whose voices are often shut out, the opportunity to speak to your congregation.

## 5 HOST A MULTIFAITH VIGIL OR SERVICE

In 2014, the General Assembly passed a resolution on PC(USA)'s interreligious stance; many refugees have faith backgrounds besides Christianity. Foster mutual understanding from Muslims, Christians, and people of other faith traditions by holding a multi-faith service or vigil for the conflict, persecution, and famine that has led to mass displacement.

## 7 PARTNER WITH ORG TO SUPPORT RESETTLEMENT

Resettling to the US 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.

## 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.

## 2 HOST BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAININGS

We have the opportunity to stand up for our neighbors if we see them being harassed or being endangered because of their race or religion. However, it is hard to know exactly what you can do in the heat of the moment. Seek out trainers to hold a bystander intervention training.

## 4 OFFER YOUR FACILITIES & RESOURCES

Oftentimes, small grassroots organizations led by refugees have a hard time finding a space for their gatherings because of resource constraints. One way to support the flourishing of your local refugee communities is by allowing them to use your facilities. This is a great way to start building trust with your refugee neighbors.

## 6 CELEBRATE HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS

Religious holidays are a great opportunity for interreligious learning and dialogue. Whether it be holding a multi-faith Christmas service or a multi-faith Iftar during Ramadan, see if you can welcome or be welcomed during a religious holiday.

## 8 HOST CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS & CIVIL RIGHTS TRAININGS

Refugees adjusting to life in the US often need education around how to be civically engaged. Muslim people in the US in particular need to know what their rights are, because they are disproportionately profiled at airports, by the police, and by other citizens. Knowledge is power. Help spread this knowledge by doing voter and civic engagement workshops and know your rights trainings in partnership with a local refugee community group.

## 10 USE MEDIA TO AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE

There needs to be a massive shift in the way the media portrays refugees. Instead of a narrative rooted in fear of the other, we need to highlight a narrative rooted in peace and love. Oftentimes, the positive contributions of refugees to their communities and the way we have been blessed by our new neighbors are overlooked. Amplify this narrative by submitting op-eds to the local paper and using social media to let people know where you, as a Presbyterian and community member, stand.

# BACKGROUND

## FAQ ON REFUGEES

### WHO ARE THE REFUGEES COMING TO THE US?

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

### WHY SHOULD WE LET REFUGEES IN 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 US 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, and the US resettling refugees can help prevent that from happening. Refugees also bolster local economies in the US by bringing labor and expertise. Read more about the contributions of refugees [here](#).

## FAQ ON MUSLIMS

### WHAT IS ISLAM?

Islam, meaning means "peace, security and wholeness through total submission to God's will," is both a religion and a way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness that should not be associated with acts of violence. Find more information about Islam [here](#).

### IF ISLAM PROMOTES PEACE, WHY IS THERE SO MUCH UNREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

There are a lot of reasons for unrest in the Middle East -- many economic and political in nature, rather than religious. Particularly after the Ottoman Empire lost World War 2, European countries carved out the Arab world with a series of mandates, designating regions of the Middle East and North Africa as protectorates of European countries. Throughout the rest of the century, there have been many independence movements across the region, but country borders and form of governance, many reminiscent of colonial history, are still contentious and ethnic tensions are high. Undoubtedly, many violent extremism groups use the name of Islam in their political and military campaigns. However, political and economic factors contribute heavily to the instability of the region, and requires much more nuanced education to understand. Furthermore, only 20% of Muslim people around the world live in the Arab world, and of those who live in the region, a vast majority are victims of violent extremism and many die fighting the violence in their home country.

## PC(USA) SOCIAL WITNESS POLICY & STATEMENTS BY STATED CLERK

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:

- 2017** [Stated Clerk opposes order banning refugees' entry into U.S.](#)
- 2016** [The 222th General Assembly \(2016\) On Responding to Our Sisters and Brothers Who Are Refugees or Internally Displaced](#)
- 2015** [Stated Clerk: Choose Welcome, not Fear](#)
- 2015** [Sign-on: Keeping Our Communities Open to American Muslims](#)
- 2014** [The 221st General Assembly \(2014\) On The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

### A LONGSTANDING TRADITION...

PC(USA)'s support for refugee resettlement began during the refugee crisis of World War 2. The 160th General Assembly (1948) of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America 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.

Three different Presbyterian agencies are active in supporting refugees. Get connected to get updates on their work!

OFFICE OF  
IMMIGRATION  
ISSUES  
(website)

PRESBYTERIAN  
DISASTER  
ASSISTANCE  
(website)

OFFICE  
OF PUBLIC  
WITNESS  
(website)

# RESOURCES

## BACKGROUND

### **FAQ on Refugee Resettlement**

*Presbyterian Disaster Assistance*

An introduction to the process of refugee resettlement in the US, covering who is a refugee, how eligibility is assessed, the current resettlement system, and how churches can get involved in supporting resettlement.

### **Snapshot of Refugees' Economic Impact and Integration in the United States**

*Church World Service, 2 pages, April 2017*

Short document that illustrate the economic impact of refugees, particularly highlighting how refugees strengthen the local economy.

### **Know Your Rights (As A Refugee)**

*Church World Service, 5 pages, March 2017*

There has been a lot of confusion and fear around 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 & Processing Centers: Map & Contact List**

*Refugee Processing Center*

Find a Refugee Resettlement Agency near you. These agencies can help get you plugged in to better understanding and supporting your refugee neighbors.

## TOOLKITS

### **Refugees Welcome Toolkit**

*Refugees Welcome, 50 pages, 2016*

A guide put together by a coalition of faith groups dedicated to welcoming refugees. It gives you tools and resources on how to speak with your policymakers about refugees, amplify your voice in the media, hold a service in solidarity with refugees and Muslims, and host a welcome dinner for refugees in your community.

More resources at the campaign website [here](#).

### **2017 Toolkit: Visits with Local, State, and National Leaders to Welcome Refugees**

*Refugee Council USA, 21 pages, April 2017*

Includes an introduction to advocacy, a guide to building an advocacy team, templates for action alerts to federal, state, and local representatives, sample letters, sample welcoming resolutions, and other resources to help you ensure your government is adopting refugee and Muslim-friendly policies.

### **World Refugee Day**

*Presbyterian Disaster Assistance*

World Refugee Day is on June 20. Browse through the many resources provided by PDA and its partners to help you get started on welcoming refugees on the right side of the webpage, including a 12-minute video on the Syrian conflict.

### **How to host an Interfaith Iftar Party**

*Refugees Welcome, 2 pages, 2016*

Iftar is the meal eaten to break one's fast during the holy month of Ramadan. From sunrise until sundown, Muslims around the world focus on practicing abstinence, particularly by refraining from eating and drinking. Learn how you can host an interfaith Iftar and celebrate Ramadan together.

### **Reflection and Prayer for World Refugee Day**

*Office of Immigration Issues, PC(USA), 2 pages*

This resource includes scriptures, 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.

### **Rapid Response and Mobilization: Community Response to Refugee and Muslim Ban**

*GreaterAs1, 5 pages, March 2017*

Guide to how to form a community response to Executive Order that halts refugee resettlement and bans people coming to the US from 6 majority-Muslim countries. Includes instruction on holding a press event and creating a social media advisory adaptable to other pro-refugee actions.

### **STAND TOGETHER: Messaging to Support Muslims and Refugees in Challenging Times**

*Welcoming America, 28 pages*

This toolkit shows how you can use communications products and opportunities to reframe the refugee experience. You can change narratives around refugees by applying these ideas into your press releases and talking points, and when choosing spokespeople and stories to tell. ([Accompanying webinar 1](#), [Accompanying webinar 2](#))

### **Neighbors Together: Promising Practices to Strengthen Relations with Refugees and Muslims**

*Welcoming America, 20 pages*

A guide of promising practice to prevent and address anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiments in your local community, in particular building meaningful contact between diverse populations; positive communications strategies; and engaging civic and community leader. ([Accompanying webinar](#))

## STORIES & EXAMPLES

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

### **Refugee Council (USA) Refugee State Profiles**

### **Interfaith Immigration Coalition Welcoming Refugees State-by-State Reference**

### **#WeChooseWelcome Photo Album**

If you are viewing this in print, find the web version with active links at [bit.ly/wechoosewelcome](http://bit.ly/wechoosewelcome).