

A Declaration on Welcoming Refugees

December 10, 2015

We, the Pittsburgh Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), during this special Advent Season seek to remind the public and ourselves that as we prepare to welcome our Lord Jesus' birth on Christmas, we also are committed to welcoming the strangers, the vulnerable, and, of course, Syrian refugees fleeing from their war-torn homeland.

This 2015 Advent Season, we Presbyterian Christians focus on the arrival of the "Kingdom of God" being introduced by the birth of infant Jesus of Nazareth, God's own Son. Jesus was born in a stable and had a manger for a crib; he himself was a refugee very soon after his birth. From the Gospel of Matthew we learn that his father was told in a dream that his family was in mortal danger. They fled to Egypt and stayed there until the murderous King Herod was dead. Then they returned to Galilee.

This season too, we modern-day followers of Jesus struggle with making sense of the enormous reality of international refugees. There are currently over 60,000,000 displaced human beings. 4 million have fled from Syria, and 6.5 million are displaced there internally.

As citizens of the USA, we have learned from grade school and received a tradition of being kind to refugees. We must remember the words of Emma Lazarus etched on the welcome symbol of the Statue of Liberty:

*"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to
breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless tempest-tossed, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

We want to remain loyal to Jesus as he was always kind and compassionate to troubled human beings. We want to be compassionate as Jesus was compassionate. We remember that he said that at the end of time as we know it, he would separate people into two groups. Among the blessed of God are those of whom Jesus said, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. . . . As you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, so you did it to me." And to those who did not welcome strangers on earth, Jesus said, "As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

We do not want any to be among those! (Matthew 25: 31-46)

We also desire to reaffirm our US practice of welcoming refugees. God's love conquers fear, and we call upon God's love to overcome any fears and fear-mongers now.

This Advent Season, we commend those who put the Advent lessons to heart in faith and action. We also commend those public leaders who remain steadfast in being kind and compassionate to displaced human beings.

May this Advent Season prepare us to welcome the stranger and work for peace in the New Year.

This declaration was adopted unanimously by Pittsburgh Presbytery at its meeting on December 10, 2015, at the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church.