



WILLOW CREEK
ASSOCIATION



REFUGEE CRISIS

Leadership Guide

Mobilize your church to respond to today's largest humanitarian crisis





HOW TO USE THIS LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Set aside an hour to gather the leaders in your church and walk through this material together. It's designed to help you more thoroughly understand the refugee crisis and prepare to engage your congregation.

To dive deeper into the refugee crisis, visit willowcreek.com/worldvision.

Dear friends,

The world is witnessing the forced migration of **65 million people worldwide, the most in recorded history.**

Over 11 million Syrians—half of them children—have fled the horrors of civil war. Millions are struggling to survive in camps and settlements where jobs are nonexistent and basic services are stretched thin.

Both of us have seen poverty close up. *This is suffering of a different kind.*

And it creates the necessity for bold leadership. Christian leaders must rally the church to its God-given mission of caring for the most vulnerable, which today includes millions of refugees and displaced people.

There is much to lose if we fail to act. Both the authenticity and the relevance of our faith are at stake. Our faith compels us to reflect God's love to *all of our neighbors*. And it seeks to be worthy of Jesus' declaration in Matthew 25:35: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat . . . I was a stranger and you invited me in."

World Vision, with its effective work in the Middle East and other fragile places, and the Willow Creek Association, with its global church network, are partnering to provide a powerful on-ramp to churches who want to make a world-changing difference in this crisis.

I hope you'll join us in seizing this historic moment and responding to this remarkable opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ in the Holy Land and worldwide. God bless you on your journey!

Bill Hybels, Founder and Chairman of the Board,
Willow Creek Association

Rich Stearns, President,
World Vision U.S.



The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

—Psalm 9:9 (NIV)

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Why the church must respond to the global refugee crisis

In Lebanon, 6-year-old Aiya and her siblings wake up screaming in terror. They're still haunted by the memory of their father, a humble farmer in Syria, being killed by a rocket blast. Like millions of others, this family fled their home with little more than the clothes on their backs. "I'm terrified for our livelihood," says Aiya's mother. "We have nothing."



Aiya (center) and her siblings, refugees in Lebanon

It's the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today—65 million people globally, displaced just like Aiya. We are witnessing the greatest displacement of people in recorded history, and the church cannot stay silent. The refugee crisis is unlike any other poverty issue—it is suffering of a different kind. Following the example of Jesus, who entered into suffering for our sake, we as Christian leaders must come alongside the hurting and help the distressed.

For refugees—especially the children—life is full of trauma, desperation, and heartbreak. These children have been ripped from the lives they once knew. They have little stability, and virtually no resources. Most can no longer go to school, and because of their uncertain circumstances, they face the further tragedies of early marriage, child labor, and recruitment into armed groups. Childhood is being lost. It's happening right now, and *an entire generation is at risk.*

Whatever the reason, people forced from home need our help. Refugees are running from war and violence; natural disasters; religious persecution, political oppression, and ethnic injustice; food crisis, drought, and famine. They run in fear for their lives—either within their own country (*internally displaced people*) or to another country (*refugees*).

Half of all refugees have been in exile for over 10 years.

On average, 24 people were displaced from their homes every minute of every day during 2015.

One in every five displaced people worldwide is from Syria.

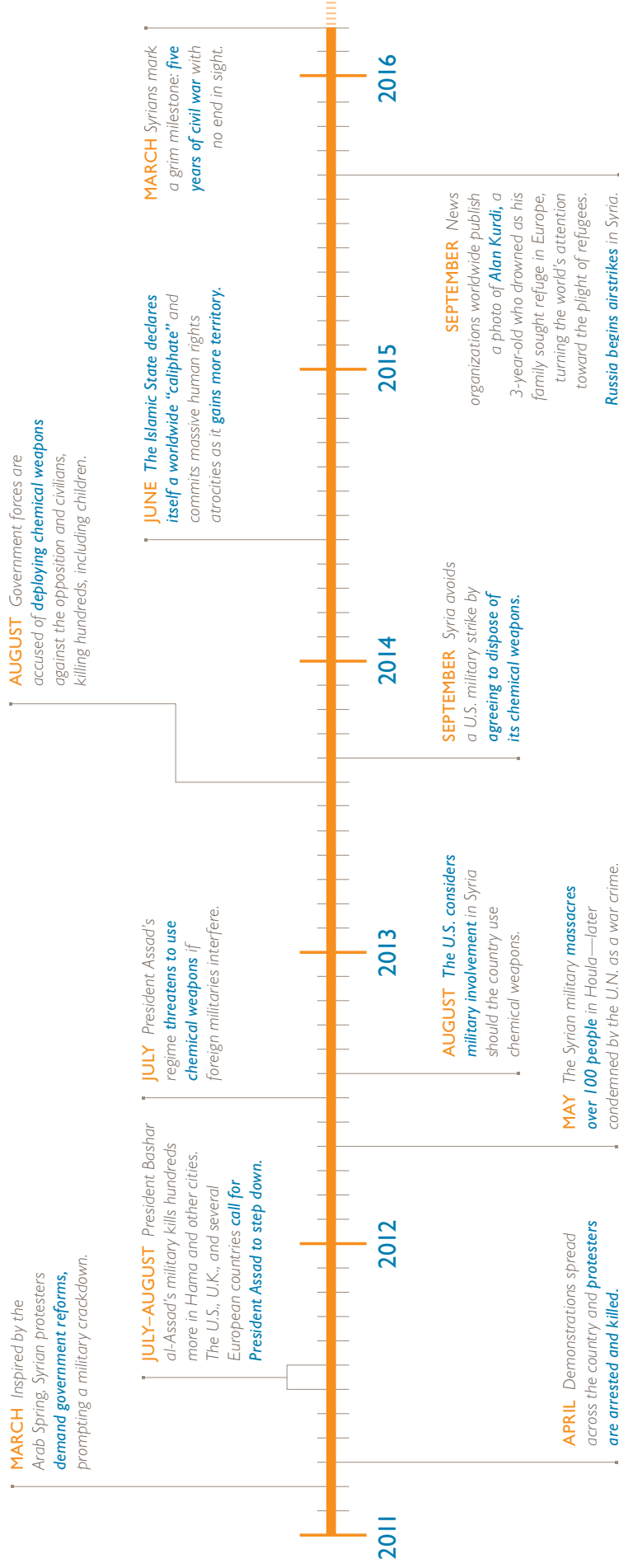
More than 11 million Syrians—half the population—have been uprooted by a brutal civil war. That's like every person in New York City and Los Angeles becoming homeless. Before the conflict, many Syrian families had lives not unlike ours. Now parents and children are leaving their homes and all their belongings to flee in search of peace, while city after city is destroyed by fighting.

See the next page for a quick background on the five-year conflict in Syria and its humanitarian impact. »

Half of the world's refugees are children.

One of every 113 people in the world is now a refugee.

SYRIA TIMELINE » From protests to international war



A biblical mandate: What the Bible says about refugees

God's love prompts us to break the silence—and show His mercy

Throughout Scripture we see that **God's heart of compassion is with the poor and the outcast**. His ear is tuned to the stranger and foreigner in the midst of their lament. *The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow . . .* (Psalm 146:9, NIV).



Beginning with Hagar, who was displaced when she was expelled from Abraham's household, **we see this theme of God helping and protecting refugees, foreigners, and the dispossessed**. So it's no surprise that God revealed to Moses instructions for their treatment. *You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt* (Exodus 23:9, ESV). The basis for the command rests in the Israelites' own suffering at the hands of the Egyptians: *You know how it feels to be a sojourner*.

And Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV) instructs Israel, *When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God*. This was unprecedented in its time and even today: **Treat the foreigner like you would treat your native-born—like your family**. Love them. Help them out. Offer kindness. Don't take advantage of them. Show compassion. Be merciful. Care about what happens to them.

Jesus picks up this thread while answering the timeless question from the "expert in the law": *Who is my neighbor?* (Luke 10:29). The story serves as an illustration of how **we're called to rise above cultural differences and serve one another as fellow humans**. The Samaritan helped the Jewish man, despite their differences in culture and beliefs. *Go and do likewise*, Jesus then commands in Luke 10:37.

These marching orders remain true for us. We are to offer help freely to those who need it. We are to care for those hurting and beaten on life's road—no matter who they are.

Together, let us answer God's call to serve the oppressed and suffering. Let us help refugees and others displaced by conflict, oppression, and other tragedies. We have a mandate to show God's love to children and families in horrifying circumstances. This brings honor to our Savior and Teacher.

"The refugee crisis is more than a political issue. It's an issue that serious-minded Christ-followers cannot ignore. Christians, especially the leaders amongst us, must engage and figure out solutions to serve those in great need with the love we receive from Christ."

—Bill Hybels, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Willow Creek Association

Ways to discuss the crisis with your leadership team

As leaders in the church, it's on us to start talking about this crisis. We've seen the facts and we've heard the stories, but now we need to decide what to do about them. It's our responsibility to cast a vision for how our churches—individually and together—are going to live out God's command to love and serve the sojourner. With your team, take the time to read Father Daniel's story on page 11. Afterward, use these questions to explore with your team how you'll respond.

1

What part of Father Daniel's story stood out to you? If you were to find yourself in his situation, how would you and your leadership team react? How do you think your church would react?

2

Take some time to think about your church's view of the refugee crisis, both in Syria and around the world. Has it been on your heart? Has it been on others' hearts? How does this view compare with what the Bible says about responding to refugees and foreigners? (To start the conversation, review Exodus 23:9, Leviticus 19:34, and Matthew 25:35.)

3

What are some ways you (and your team) could bring greater attention to the crisis in both your church and your community?

4

What barriers might you encounter, both inside and outside the church, when talking about the refugee crisis?

5

If you haven't already, think about what kind of global impact you would like your church to make, and begin casting a vision together. How can serving and praying for refugees tie in with that vision?

6

What do you think might happen to the children of Syria—and other displaced children around the world—if we fail to respond to this crisis?

For more discussion questions, download our complimentary Syria Small Group Guide at willowcreek.com/worldvision.

"I've watched a transformation of a church. It's hard to be part of Faith Church and really a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and not be somehow tangibly a participant in the mission of the gospel—proclaiming it but also acting in it."

—Bob Bouwer, Senior Pastor, Faith Church (Dyer, IN)

*“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in ...”*

—Matthew 25:35 (NIV)

Lebanon

Lead your team in a time of prayer for refugees

Seeking God's heart for refugees leads us to respond with action and assistance—and with an outpouring of prayer. Use these prayer points for yourself and with your team, lifting up the plight of refugees to God.

- » Pray that God will aid families who have fled their home country and guide them to safe communities.
- » Pray for families to get critical resources like shelter, food, water, and healthcare.
- » Pray that children whose educations have been disrupted will be able to resume classes and prepare for a brighter future.
- » Pray specifically for churches and pastors in host countries in the Syria region to be welcoming and supportive of refugees by meeting their ongoing physical and spiritual needs.
- » Pray for government leaders around the world to show compassion to refugees by providing both immediate aid and support for long-term solutions.
- » Pray for the global Christian community to show the fullness of God's love through compassion, prayer, and material support.

Discover more ideas on how to pray for the refugee crisis and the lives it affects at willowcreek.com/worldvision.

“This is our chance to show a watching world how the church can work together. It's a chance to help people in a land that is weary. It's a chance to offer hope where there isn't much.”

—Greg Holder, Lead Pastor, The Crossing (Chesterfield, MO)

What can your church do?

The wealth of resources below will help you bring the refugee crisis to life! No matter your congregation's size, you can find just the right way to touch their hearts and mobilize them to reach out to those in greatest need.



E-book

LEARN

Download our “Understanding the Syria Crisis and the Role of the Church” e-book for compelling refugee stories and more background on the crisis.

Download our “Stand Alongside Syrian Refugees” small group guide for a four-session study about reflecting God’s love to refugees.

See videos and read stories of refugees’ struggles—and how people like you are responding to their overwhelming need.

Get these complimentary resources and more at willowcreek.com/worldvision.

“Our partnership with World Vision helped us develop a love for the poor, provide a vehicle to respond, and inspire our congregation to be generous.”

—Bob Merritt, Lead Pastor,
Eagle Brook Church (St. Paul, MN)



Virtual reality video experience

EXPERIENCE

Host a Refugee Sunday to open eyes to the plight of refugees worldwide. Choose the materials that will best engage your church, including:

- » **Videos, story cards, and discipleship tools** for an unforgettable service
- » An immersive **tent exhibit** for your church lobby sharing stories of Syrian refugee children
- » A **virtual reality video** experience, “Surviving Syria: Through the Eyes of a Child Refugee,” to take you deeper into refugees’ personal stories
- » An **all-ages event** for your congregation to fill backpacks with supplies for child refugees
- » The World Vision Experience, an exhibit that shares the heartbreaking stories of people in the margins

Pray as a church for refugees around the world using the prayer points on page 8, and as God leads you.

Sign up for Refugee Sunday at willowcreek.com/worldvision.

SYRIAN REFUGEES: FAST FACTS

An enormous humanitarian crisis

The violent civil war has left 13.5 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance.

4.8 million Syrians are refugees and 6.6 million are displaced within Syria; half of these are children.

Most displaced Syrians remain in the Middle East—in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and other parts of Syria; less than 10 percent have fled to Europe.

Refugee children are susceptible to malnutrition and diseases brought on by poor sanitation, including diarrheal diseases like cholera. Cold weather increases the risk of pneumonia and other respiratory infections.

Many of these children have to work to support their families. Often they labor in dangerous or demeaning circumstances for little pay.

Children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation in unfamiliar and overcrowded conditions. Without adequate income to support their families, and fearful of their daughters being molested, refugee parents—especially mothers on their own—may opt to arrange early marriage for girls, some as young as 13.

Nearly 3 million Syrian children are not attending school. The U.N. children's agency says the war has reversed 10 years of progress in education for Syrian children.



Middle Eastern churches are serving refugees:

FATHER DANIEL'S STORY

In Iraq, Father Daniel oversees a camp of hundreds of displaced Iraqi Christians, most of whom fled their villages in the summer of 2014. It's a heavy responsibility, especially for someone who's only 26.



Father Daniel with displaced children in northern Iraq

It isn't something he would have imagined doing only a few years ago. Before becoming a priest, he studied to become a doctor in Ukraine. When Muslim classmates asked him questions about his faith, he wanted to respond thoughtfully and thoroughly, so he took online theology classes. As a result of those studies, he decided, as he says, "to become a spiritual doctor instead of a regular doctor."

It's an appropriate comparison, especially since Father Daniel's flock is hungry for healing. "What happened to them was a big trauma," he says. "They need to be educated on how to deal with this loss. It's really big. They worked for so many years. They have nothing."

As many as 1,600 people were cared for the first year. Today, with refugees moving to and from different communities, about 700 still live here—and Father Daniel knows every child in the camp by name. When he walks through the camp, they gravitate toward him, holding his hand and basking in his smile. World Vision works with him to provide their families with crucial resources like food vouchers, healthcare, and safe places for the children to play and learn.

It's going to take time, but he knows that these children—and all the displaced—can recover. When the children first came to the camp he asked them to draw their feelings. They drew guns, bombs, and war. But six months later, he repeated the exercise. "'Now draw your dream,' I said. I saw pictures of doctors, teachers, singers, and dancers ..."

Father Daniel's heart for these children and families is obvious to anyone who's met him. In Iraq, he stands as a shining example of what it means to lead with a heart that mirrors God's.

As pastors and leaders, we too can reflect God's heart for those forced from their homes. It's our responsibility to share this heart with our congregations, and lead them to serve God by serving those in need. Christ is working in and through Father Daniel. Will you invite him to work in and through you and your church?

Learn more about how your church can support church leaders like Father Daniel at willowcreek.com/worldvision.

FROM A PASTOR: A CALL TO ACTION

ASLAN IS ON THE MOVE

God is working in the Syrian refugee crisis, and we're part of that work

By Greg Holder, Lead Pastor, The Crossing (Chesterfield, MO) and author of the upcoming book *The Genius of One* (NavPress)



Pastor Greg Holder with a refugee family in Lebanon

It's not until the seventh chapter of the first book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* that you even learn the principal character's name. He's the Christ figure; he's the king. But it's only in the seventh chapter you hear these words: "They say that Aslan is on the move." And that changes everything in the story.

God is up to something in the Middle East, in a land that is weary, with people that are losing hope—Aslan is on the move, and we get a chance to decide how we will join the refugee response. But if it's going to be a movement of God, it will be you and me as individuals and our churches figuring out, learning, and growing in awareness. Eventually some of us will take the risk to move into a place of engagement. Then some of us will actually take the next step to investment—we will invest our time, our money, our ministry to this—but it will not be a top-down mandate. It has to be us allowing the people of God to move into this.

Create space for conversations

Until then, we pastors have to create a safe space for difficult conversations, because the people you will be talking to are on a continuum. As I have those conversations, I've found they're getting clouded. It's overwhelming. You see it on the faces of the people who are there, sitting in a plastic tent five minutes from the Syrian border. You see it on their faces, but you also see it on the faces of those showing up to help—it's overwhelming, it's too big, it's confusing. But fear enters into this. Sometimes anger. It's the latest headline. We know about the rhetoric that is happening because of the presidential election, so what is it as pastors we're supposed to do?

I'll tell you what I've done. I preempt these arguments by saying we're going to have them. As I've tried to have conversations about this, I've noticed we lump people into categories. We make broad generalizations and assumptions. That's not right.

(cont.)

(From a pastor, cont.)

We have to vow that we will not allow that language to take place and instead say, “We’re not going to arrive at the same place on this, we’re not going to agree on this, but we can agree that we will have a common language and we will NOT destroy community over this.” In the undocumented work that we’re doing in Ferguson, there is one thought that we keep in mind, no matter what we do, and it is this: distance demonizes. From a distance, someone just looks like a problem; they look like someone I don’t want to know. But up close, now they have a story, now they’re made in the image of God, now they have a name—now we can start.

Use stories to bridge gaps

When you begin to move from awareness to engagement, it’s really the stories that are the bridge. So when I’m sitting in a tent with Rich Stearns in Lebanon, and we’re hearing a family that is weeping and wondering if Dad is even alive in Syria, now it’s not theory. When you’re sitting at a school in a slum in Beirut, and all the kids are drawing pictures of hand grenades and bombs, it’s not theory. I believe people like World Vision can help us bridge the gaps and can help us tell those stories.

We have to keep bridging this gap with stories, but I can tell you, straight up, if this is going to be a movement that makes a difference over the years, we don’t just talk about awareness or engagement. For us to feed, clothe, and provide, it will cost money.

Is this going to make a difference? I’m not naive enough to think that our involvement now will make everything in that region of the world better in the coming years. But if you’re telling me that providing a cup of clean water, warm food, a place to sleep, and a school for children won’t make a difference, of course it does. We just don’t know how much. I just know we’ve been called to this. That’s what I want to challenge you with, both across the church spectrum and in your own churches.

Strive for unity with God

I’ll remind you of a story you know. On the worst night of his life, after he had a meal with his closest friends, Jesus is on his way to Gethsemane to pour his heart out to his Father, and he prays another prayer. You’ll find it in John 17. He prays for himself, he prays for his disciples, and then he prays for us. He doesn’t pray that we would be the coolest kids on the block. He doesn’t even pray that we would have airtight theological arguments or witty comebacks to the people who disagree with us.

You know what he prays? He says, “Father, may they be one, as you and I are one.” So somehow, the way you and I love, worship, work, and dream together; the way we face a crisis that we will never again see the likes of in our lifetime—this could reflect the oneness, the love between Father and Son, and the world could take notice. This is our chance to show a watching world how the church can work together. It’s a chance to help people in a land that is weary. It’s a chance to offer hope where there isn’t much.

(cont.)

RESOURCES

(From a pastor, cont.)

We're not going to agree on what we should do, when we should do it, and how much we should do. This will be a movement of God that you and I can't predict. And if we do this together and the world takes notice, then this prayer of Jesus' is answered, the overlooked and forgotten are championed, and the kingdom of God is at hand.

You're not crazy for caring. You're not alone, because we will do this together. And we're not alone, because there is One who goes before us. There is One who is already up to something, and he is not intimidated or overwhelmed by this. They say that Aslan is on the move, and I think that changes everything.

Greg Holder is an author, speaker, and lead pastor of The Crossing in Chesterfield, Missouri. Learn more about him at gregholder.com.

Learn more about how to engage your church in responding to the refugee crisis at willowcreek.com/worldvision.



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World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, we serve alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people.

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