

“Remember, You Too Were Once Strangers”

A SOLIDARITY VIGIL FOR REFUGEES

NOTES

- Please feel free to use this Solidarity Vigil resource in its entirety, or you can also adapt it, revise it, or shorten it to fit into another event or specific timeframe.
- You can find the most updated advocacy letter content and other resources on our “I am Migration” [page](#).
- Please reach out to university@crs.org with any questions.

MATERIALS

- Audio-visual equipment
- Internet access (for videos and letter writing)
- Baskets large enough to collect letters (if signing handwritten letters)
- Bible, open to Matthew 2:13–14, 16
- 2–4 large candles
- Candle for each participant
- Copies of this solidarity vigil for leader, cantor, readers and person managing PowerPoint
- Copies of the 2-paged letters to your members of Congress (see last pages of this document) OR participants can use smartphones or laptops to electronically sign [using this link](#).
- Lighter or matches
- Music for songs, “Come and Fill Our Hearts,” and “O Lord, Hear Our Prayer,” by Jacques Berthier, Taizé Community
- Pens for participants (if signing handwritten letters)
- PowerPoint Presentation for images and visuals: “Remember, You Too Were Once Strangers”
 - [Download PPT version](#) of PowerPoint
 - [Download PDF version](#) of PowerPoint

PREPARATION

- Invite and prepare cantor to lead the Taizé songs, “Come and Fill Our Hearts,” and “O Lord, Hear Our Prayer.” Prepare song sheets with lyrics and make available to participants.
- Set up the vigil space:
 - Light the large candles and put the rest of the candles around them in a central space in front of the room/church.
 - Place baskets near the candles (if signing handwritten letters)
 - Test PowerPoint presentation and video.
 - Place a Bible and one copy of this solidarity vigil at the podium or lectern.
 - Put copies of the letter to Congress and pens at each seat or pew (if signing handwritten letters).
- Select and prepare one leader and seven readers:
 - Give each reader a copy of this solidarity vigil with their part highlighted.
 - Option: Instead of having one reader lead the “Refugees in Scripture reflection” section at the lectern, invite seven people to each read one of the excerpts. Direct them to be seated throughout the congregation, and to stand and read their parts at the appropriate time.
- Prepare someone to click through the PowerPoint presentation as instructed in the prayer service.
- Be prepared to instruct participants to identify their members of Congress for letter signing (if signing handwritten letters) or to instruct participants to sign [the online letter at this link](#) (which can also be navigated to via <http://university.crs.org/migration>.)
 - Participants will need to access the Internet. You can either set up laptops/tablets connected to Wi-Fi or rely on participants to use their smartphones.
 - For hand-written letters
 - Make copies of the letters as they are from the end of this document for each participant. Each participant will need three letters: one for each of their two senators and one for their representative. Note that the letters are 2 pages and can be printed front-back.
 - During the event, you will show participants how to identify their senators and representative, and how to address the letters. They will complete the letters with the date of the event and the name of your university, and other information
 - During the letter-writing section, offer to show participants how to find their members of Congress online at confrontglobalpoverty.com/toolkit, using the “Find your district” button under the section labeled “Meet with Congress.” Ask them to enter their ZIP code when prompted. After they enter it, the names of their two senators and representative will pop up. They should write the full names of their senators and representative at the top of the letter.
 - Your letters will have the most impact if they are hand delivered to local offices. [Check out these tips](#) on how to set up a meeting with your member of Congress.

- If you can't hand deliver the letters to members, it's best to mail them to their local or district offices. If you are mailing letters to several states and/or districts, be sure to mail the letters separately to each senator and representative. You can find senators' addresses by visiting www.senate.gov, and representatives by visiting www.house.gov.
- It helps to send along a copy of any press coverage of the solidarity vigil along with the letters. Also, be sure to follow up with each member of Congress you sent a letter to so you'll know whether they received it.

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 1.

Welcome and opening prayer

LEADER: We gather together in solidarity with refugees who have fled their home countries to seek a better life for themselves and their families. We will pray for refugees, listen to their stories and act together to ask our government leaders to support them by ensuring welcome for refugees and migrants. It is especially important for us to be together in community, to organize ourselves and our campus and to make our voices even stronger in support of migrants and refugees as the U.S. Administration releases Executive Orders and policies that are not in line with our Catholic and American values of the sacredness and dignity of human life. We know that those seeking refuge in the U.S. and elsewhere are victims, often of terrorism, violence and poverty, and that our country was founded as a nation of immigrants and refugees.

As we begin this solidarity vigil, we remember that throughout Scripture, God has given us examples to follow. God stood with refugees, even to the point of becoming a refugee himself, in the person of Jesus. And so we pray ...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ...

God of our Wandering Ancestors,

Long have we known
That your heart is with the refugee:
That you were born into time
In a family of refugees
Fleeing violence in their homeland,
Who then gathered up their hungry child
And fled into alien country.
Their cry, your cry, resounds through the ages:
 "Will you let me in?"
Give us hearts that break open

When our brothers and sisters turn to us with
that same cry.
Then surely all these things will follow:

Ears will no longer turn deaf to their voices.
Eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a
threat.
Tongues will not be silenced but will instead
advocate.
And hands will reach out—working for peace in
their homelands,
working for justice in the lands where they seek
safe haven.
Lord, protect all refugees in their travels.
May they find a friend in me
And so make me worthy of the refuge I have
found in you.

Amen

Opening song

CANTOR TO LEAD: *Come and Fill Our Hearts*, by Jacques Berthier, Taizé Community

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 2.

Gospel reading

READER ONE: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:

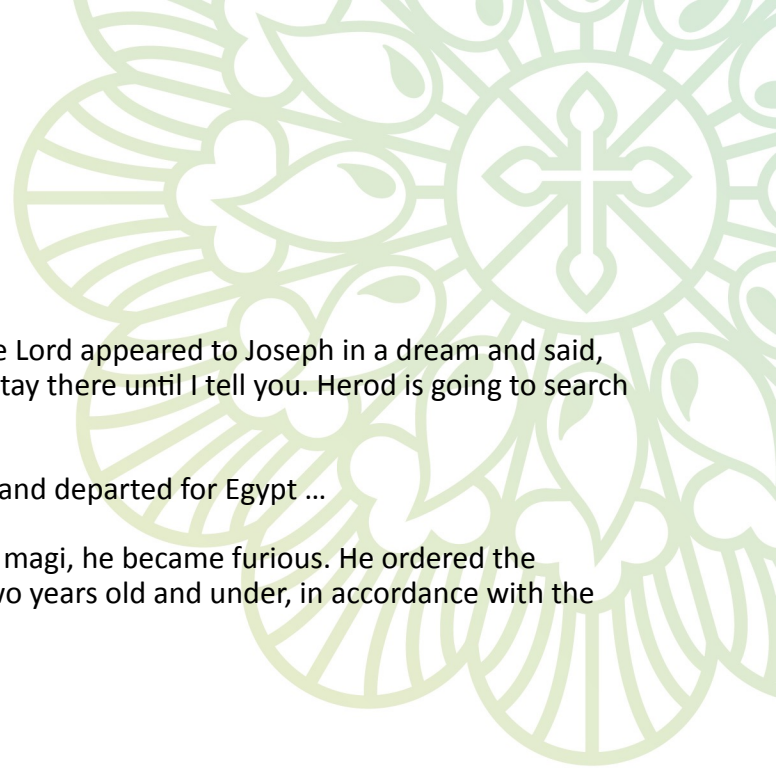
When [the magi] had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt ...

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.

The Gospel of the Lord,

RESPONSE: Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.



CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 3

Refugees in Scripture reflection

LEADER: We will listen now to passages throughout Scripture that give very clear instructions about how we should treat the refugee—or “alien” or “stranger”—among us. After a passage is read, we will say together: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Note: *One option is to divide the passages among 7 readers and invite them to sit scattered throughout the congregation and stand to read their parts.*

READER TWO: You shall not oppress a resident alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: Cursed be anyone who deprives the resident alien, the orphan or the widow of justice! And all the people shall answer, “Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:19)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: You shall have but one rule, for alien and native-born alike. I, the LORD, am your God. (Leviticus 24:22)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be swift to bear witness against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, those who deprive a laborer of wages, oppress a widow or an orphan, or turn aside a resident alien, without fearing me, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:5)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: Listen to my prayer, LORD, hear my cry; do not be deaf to my weeping! For I am with you like a foreigner, a refugee, like my ancestors. (Psalms 39:13)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER TWO: Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

LEADER: We remember the journey of our ancestors in faith, the Israelites, who fled from Egypt with Moses to escape slavery. God stood with the Israelites, protecting them from Pharaoh, and when they fled Egypt they became strangers in a new land.

God identifies with the refugee even more strongly in the story of the Holy Family. Jesus, the Son of God, became a refugee child when Mary and Joseph departed by night with him and left Israel for Egypt. They escaped from Israel to avoid the wrath of King Herod, who ordered the massacre of all boys 2 years old and younger. Today, as we hear about the refugees who are fleeing the Middle East, let us remember the story of these desperate parents, who fled with their infant child, and what belongings they had, to seek safety.

The journey of the Israelites fleeing Egypt, of the Holy Family escaping Herod, and of the refugees

leaving Syria today can feel like distant stories that have no bearing on our lives. To enkindle solidarity in our hearts, we need to remind ourselves constantly that these stories are real—that men, women and children with names and lives, hopes and fears, are suffering at this very moment. We will now listen to some of the accounts of refugees who have made it to Europe. As we listen, we pray that God will open our hearts and move us toward compassionate action.



CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 4.

Sharing the stories

READER THREE: The Basheer family fled Syria when a bomb destroyed their home. Luckily, Khaled Basheer, his wife, and three children survived. Two of them are shown in this photo.

“Can you really say we were lucky?” Khaled asks. “We had to live in a tent in the suburbs of our hometown, Aleppo, from then on—for more than 1 year. And we were frightened every single minute, every day and every night.”

The Basheers feared more bomb attacks. They heard explosions and gunfire nearly every day. “We were also very frightened of an attack by the [Islamic State]. We heard such horrible stories [about] how cruelly they kill innocent people and rape women and young girls,” Khaled says.

At a refugee camp in Serbia, they expressed their hope to make it to Germany. “Daddy promised we will get a nice home there,” 8-year-old Omama says. “And he said there will be good people there.”

Khaled was a construction worker in Syria. He says he’s used to working hard and wants to do that again to provide that nice home.

Omama sometimes tells her father that she feels homesick. His reply: “How can you feel homesick when there is no home any longer?”

READER FOUR: The Syrian civil war has led to the displacement of more than 11 million people over the past 5 years. That’s more than half the country’s pre-war population. And that number continues to grow every day.

The number of refugees and migrants in Europe surpassed 1 million as of December 2015. Refugee families need food, water, sanitation, protection from the elements and legal advice.

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 5.

READER FIVE: Abdalkarim Zahra arrived in Serbia after making the treacherous journey from Turkey, where he had spent 2 years after fleeing his home in Syria. The national army of Bashar al-Assad was trying to recruit him. “I deserted,” he says. “I’m a sensitive man. I could never hurt, let alone kill, someone.”

Zahra worked in a shoe repair shop in Turkey for 2 years, then headed to Europe in search of a better life.

“I walked so many roads,” he says. “I crossed so many rivers. I went over so many hills and valleys. I lost my home, my belongings, literally everything.”

Zahra is only 26, yet he says he is “totally finished.”

His journey took him from Turkey through Greece and Macedonia to Serbia. Smugglers took all his money. He was pushed into an overcrowded boat to reach Greece. He has been kicked by border police and has stayed in three different camps in Serbia alone.

“Can I still be called a human?” he asks.

READER FOUR: Seventy percent of refugees who fled to Europe came through Greece in 2015. The sea route taken by most refugees from Turkey to Greece is perilous. Yet refugees continue risking their lives to reach safe havens. Some 2,000 Syrians drowned in the Mediterranean attempting to reach European shores. Others have become victims of trafficking, are subjected to abuse en route, or both. Some spend their life savings or take on massive debt for a new start.

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 6.

READER SIX: Malak, a young Syrian woman who

fled her home in Aleppo a couple of years ago, has been working as a teacher in Turkey.

“It was always my dream to be a teacher,” she says. “But, this dream is to be with children back in Aleppo.”

Instead, she is teaching Syrian children who, like her, have lost their homes and are living as refugees. Many are traumatized by the violence they’ve witnessed.

“At first the children would sit by themselves, alone, in a corner,” Malak says. “Now, they are no longer screaming or shouting [in fear].”

“At first, every single child would draw planes or guns or tanks,” she says. “We want to give these children space to move and feel free.”

One of the activities Malak does with her students is to start a story and then let the children continue it, each adding something.

“They love to create a story with a happy ending,” she says.

READER FOUR: Half of the 65 million people displaced globally today are children, and this “lost generation” could spend their entire childhood without a place to call home. Many Syrian refugee children are dealing with the impacts of distress, trauma and grief.

Education is also an urgent need. It helps give kids a sense of normalcy and routine. Plus, the longer a child is out of school, the less likely he or she is to ever return.

But going back to school is a challenge. As refugees, children face language barriers and long distances from government schools. Identity papers are often needed to enroll in school, but many families fled Syria at a moment’s notice, without time to grab their belongings.

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 7.

LEADER: As we listen to these stories, it is easy to feel simultaneously moved and overwhelmed. The needs are vast: We want to help, but where do we start?

The Catholic Church in the United States has been working tirelessly to help the Basheer family, Zahra, and Malak—and over a million other refugees. In Europe, where the numbers of refugees have surged in the past year, Catholic Relief Services is teaming with 10 local partners in Europe to provide food and relief assistance, as well as shelter, sanitation, medical care and translation services. CRS is the official international humanitarian organization of the Catholic Church in the United States. With access to a large, committed network of thousands of people from different faiths, CRS is able to respond quickly and adapt our response to the needs facing refugees.

We will now watch a short video that offers a snapshot of the Catholic Church’s response to the refugee crisis through CRS.

PLAY VIDEO: *Miriam’s Story: Finding Hope in Education* on CRS’ YouTube channel, using the link in PowerPoint slide 8.

Letter writing

LEADER: Pope Francis has said, “An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it ... If indeed ‘the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics,’ the Church ‘cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice’” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 183). We can put our faith in action and care for refugees in our midst by contributing to the work of organizations like Catholic Relief Services, by volunteering to support local agencies that assist refugees in our own communities, and by using our power through our democracy, where our voice matters. We can ask our government to do all in its power to help organizations meet the immediate needs of refugees and to end the violence that forces people to flee.

[If you are not doing handwritten letters and are rather having folks use their phones for electronic letters, please adapt the instructions accordingly. The [online link](#) will direct people to a letter that will go to their Senators, their Representative and the Administration.]

There are three letters on your seat: one for each of your senators and one for your representative. We’re asking Congress to do more to help refugees by opposing proposed restrictions on refugee admissions to the U.S. It asks Congress specifically to protect the U.S. Refugee program, particularly protect poverty-focused international humanitarian and development assistance funding in the budget.

It makes a difference when we lift up our voices together, but it’s also important that you personalize your message to your members of Congress. I invite you to take a few moments to edit the letter by adding your name, a few lines about why this issue is important to you, and your signature and home mailing address. Please also fill in the blanks about this event, noting the name of our institution, your role here, etc. After you sign the letter, place it in one of the baskets (at the front of/around the) church and take a lighted candle back to your seat. Please begin signing the letters as we sing together.

Note: Please adapt these instructions as needed. If a small group of people is hand delivering the letters to local Congressional offices, be sure to share that with the gathering. If folks are signing electronic letters, just ask them to come up to take a candle after they’ve signed, even though they won’t be dropping letters off into the basket.

If you are asking participants to find their members of Congress: **CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 8.** Direct participants to use their smartphones or laptops/tablets to access the website on the slide and ask them to click on the “Find” button to enter their ZIP code and identify their senators and representative.

CANTOR: Lead “Come and Fill Our Hearts,” by Jacques Berthier, Taizé Community, during letter signing.

Once everyone is holding a lighted candle, dim the lights.

CUE POWERPOINT SLIDE 9

Closing petitions and prayer

SONG: O Lord, Hear My Prayer, by Jacques Berthier, Taizé Community. **Note:** The response to the petitions will be led by a cantor.

LEADER: This room is now lit by our collection of candles. While no single candle could offer enough light on its own, the effect of all of the light together is to help illuminate the darkness. We keep this in mind as we continue to stand in solidarity with refugees. As we close our solidarity vigil, we keep our candles lit, and we offer one amplified prayer and song.

READER SEVEN: Our response to the petitions will be sung. We sing together:

CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer. When I call, answer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer. Come and listen to me.

READER SEVEN: For refugees all over the world: that their immediate needs for food, shelter and safety will be met and that they will also be given the opportunity to find work, put their children in school, and forge a new way forward, we pray:

CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer ...

READER SEVEN: For an end to the violence caused by religious extremism in the Middle East, and that the countries wrecked by war will be able to rebuild a peaceful society, we pray:

CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer ...

READER SEVEN: For all those people who have died caught in the crossfire of war, or on their journey out of Syria to escape the violence, that they may rest in God's eternal love, we pray:

CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer ...

READER SEVEN: That world leaders will work together to help end the violence in the Middle East and to address the needs of the men, women, and children who are flooding out of Syria and Iraq into other countries, we pray:

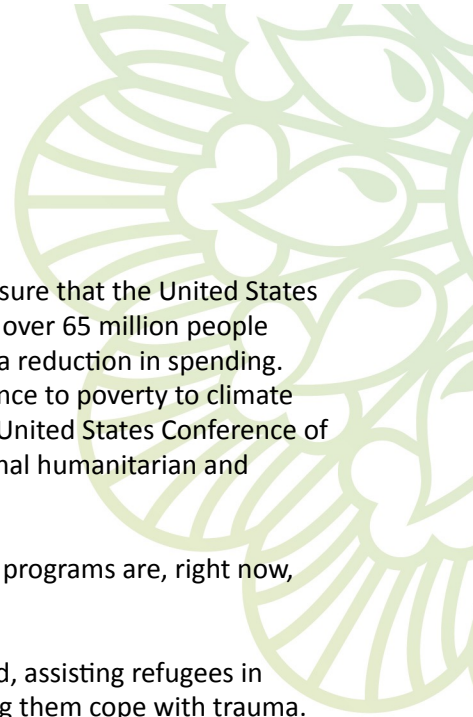
CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer ...

READER SEVEN: For all of us gathered here, that we will commit to building a culture of radical hospitality by urging our family, friends and community to open our hearts and our doors to refugees in need, we pray:

CANTOR/ALL: O Lord, hear my prayer ...

READER SEVEN: God of all people, throughout history, we have witnessed how your heart moves with compassion for the stranger. We pray that we will embrace the refugee as you have, and that we will never allow indifference or fear to extinguish the light of love. Send us with your spirit as we go out to bring your compassionate love to others. In your name we pray, Amen. *[All extinguish candles.]*





The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Address: _____

Dear Representative _____,

My name is _____ and I am writing to urge you to ensure that the United States remains committed to assisting refugees. Forced displacement is at an all-time high of over 65 million people worldwide. This signals a need for increased support for humanitarian assistance, not a reduction in spending. Moreover, long-term development helps to reduce the root causes of flight from violence to poverty to climate change. As your constituent and a supporter of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I urge you to protect funding for poverty-focused international humanitarian and development assistance.

Altogether these accounts represent only 1% of the overall U.S. budget. Humanitarian programs are, right now, saving millions of lives around the world.

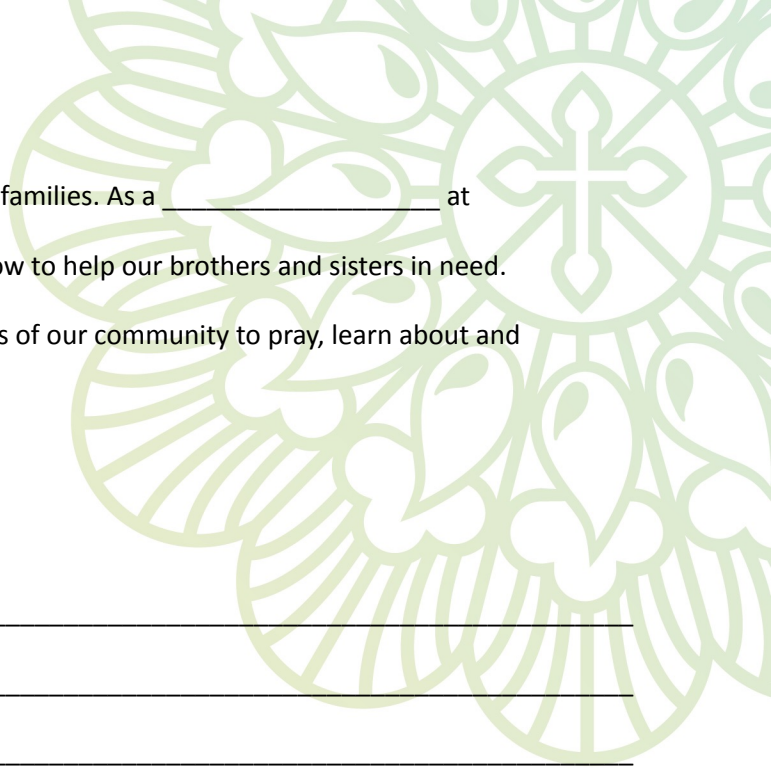
CRS and the USCCB have extensive experience working with refugees around the world, assisting refugees in everything from meeting basic needs, to helping to educate refugee children to helping them cope with trauma. More than 86% of the world's refugees live in the developing world. Our assistance helps host communities to help the refugees in their communities. With such stabilizing assistance in often sensitive regions of the world, host community leaders are better able to have sustained local support to carry out their life-saving humanitarian efforts.

The USCCB coordinates the welcome of refugees into the United States through Migration and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities across the United States. Refugees are fleeing from violence, often at the hands of the same terrorists from whom we must protect ourselves. CRS staff met a Syrian man in Serbia who swam to Europe with his two-and-a-half-year young daughter clinging to his neck. In fact, most of the refugees fleeing Syria are women and children.

As Catholics and Christians, we have a moral obligation to offer shelter and assistance to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to afford them refuge. As a Catholic, I support refugees because of my values and I agree with Pope Francis: "There must be no family without a home, no refugee without a welcome, no person without dignity..." As people of faith we must act and send a positive message to those around the world who are suffering. In Matthew 25, Jesus is asked, "When did we see you a stranger and welcome you?" Jesus replied, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least ones, you did for me." I ask that we follow this example and welcome the stranger, not turn them away. With more than 21 million refugees around the globe, now is not the time for the United States to retreat from our global leadership to protect and welcome refugees.

I ask you to do everything you can to support the needs of refugees and their families. Please protect poverty-focused international humanitarian and development assistance funding in the budget. Thank you.





Thank you for your consideration of my concerns for refugee families. As a _____ at _____, I am learning about this issue and how to help our brothers and sisters in need.

On ____ / ____ / ____ we hosted a solidarity vigil for members of our community to pray, learn about and advocate on behalf of the refugee crisis.

I care about this issue personally because

Our nation has an incredible opportunity to do what is right and merciful. Again, I ask you to do everything you can to:

Thank you for hearing my concerns.

Sincerely,

Address:

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United States Senate
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