

Advent service for refugees

Introduction for planners:

This service is designed for use during Advent with ecumenical congregations, but there is no reason why it may not be used with members of just one church. The theme of the service is refugees, and links today's refugees with Jesus' experience as a refugee himself. The church may be decorated with objects from different parts of the world if any are available to you.

For the service you will need:

1 large candle and enough small candles for every participant to have their own.
A group of 10 people who will practise beforehand.
A stick, a piece of plastic sheeting, a jug of water, a packet of tablets, a bottle of medicine and a picture of Einstein (a poster is available from CAFOD or from UNHCR).
A Bible and one reader
6 people willing to say a bidding prayer
Someone to lead the service and someone to prepare and lead the hymns.

ADVENT SERVICE

A candle is brought in procession and placed on a table at the front where everyone can see it. It is then lit and the opening hymn is sung. (An Advent hymn about waiting)

Leader: At this time of year we are waiting for Christ. We know he is coming; he will be born at Christmas, a new life will begin. At the same all around the world there are more than 19 million refugees and 25 million displaced people waiting, waiting for the chance to go home, and begin their lives all over again. Jesus was a refugee himself, forced out of his country by fear.

Reader: The flight into Egypt story.

Leader: Let's think about how Mary and Joseph felt when they had to leave their country. Close your eyes and imagine you're back home. You're sitting in a comfortable chair. Your family are with you. *(Pause for a few moments)*

Now imagine you have to leave in five minutes time. You have heard that people like you are not welcome here any more and your life is in danger. You can't stay in this country. Where will you go? What will you take with you? How do you feel? *(Pause again)*

Open your eyes again and look around *(pause)*.

Tell the person sitting next to you where you decided to go and what you thought you would take with you. Tell her/him how you think you would feel if that happened to you. What would you miss? Would you be afraid? *(Give people time to talk: then announce the next hymn.)*

People's experiences

Hymn

(A group of 10 people have been prepared beforehand for the next section. Two of them (A) stand up and walk to the front of the church, eight of them (B) go to the back.)

A1: My name is Maria. I come from Chile, in South America. My country is beautiful, you can stand on the beach next to the Pacific Ocean and look up at the snow on the mountains. I used to be a university lecturer. When Chile was taken over by the dictator Pinochet, I was threatened. Some of my friends were tortured, some disappeared and I have never seen them since. I was lucky, your government let me come to Britain. Now I teach Spanish.

A2: My name is Hu and I come from Vietnam. I had to run away from there and I spent all my money on getting a boat. I made it to Hong Kong and at that time I was lucky. Your government let me come to Britain. I studied hard and now I have my own business here.

1 speaker from group B: We are the rest of the world's refugees. There are 8 of us to every 2 who are allowed in to the rich world. We are running away from war, from torture, from threats to our freedom. We come from (take one country each): Rwanda, Sudan, Zaire, Angola, Peru, Afghanistan, Tibet, Burundi. We come from the world's poorest countries and we run to the nearest border, to countries no better off than ours. They offer us shelter and safety. Refugees from Sudan go to Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya. Refugees from Afghanistan go to Pakistan, from Rwanda to Tanzania. 8 out of 10 of the world's refugees are given asylum in the Third World, not in the rich world.

Leader: Let us pray. We pray for the world's refugees. Help us to remember that they are people like us and not statistics. We pray that those who are so afraid that they run for their lives across borders are not met with fear, but are welcomed. Amen.

Offertory procession

Hymn

An offertory procession takes place during the hymn, those carrying the gifts wait until the end of the hymn to explain to the congregation why those particular gifts were chosen.

a. I brought a stick and a piece of plastic sheeting because refugees need shelter. In camps this may be all they have to build a home.

b. I brought a jug of water because refugees need water. In this country we can use up to 1,000 litres of water a day. In refugee camps they may have to make do with 10.

c. I brought a packet of tablets and a medicine bottle, because refugees need health care. Sometimes they have been injured by fighting or torture, often they will be traumatised by what they have seen.

d. I brought a picture of Einstein, who was a refugee. Refugees don't just have needs, they bring things with them - their brains, their skills, their culture. If they are allowed to they can contribute to the society which gives them refuge.

Optional homily (could be shared discussion)

Prayers

Prayers: (*different person says each prayer; congregation respond*)

We pray for the 19 million refugees and 25 million displaced people in the world today. We pray that they may find safety, shelter, food and water. *Lord, in your mercy*

Congregation: Hear our prayer

We pray that the reasons why people are forced to leave their homes may be recognised and tackled. We pray that there may be peace, not war. We pray that all people may see that they are equal, that nobody has the right to persecute others because of their race, their gender, their culture or way of life. *Lord, in your mercy.*

We pray for those people who are forced to leave their homes because of hunger, or drought, or because their land has been taken from them. We pray for those who are effectively refugees in their own land, attacked by their own government. *Lord, in your mercy*

We pray for ourselves, that we may not be too afraid to be welcoming. We pray that we have the courage to get involved. *Lord, in your mercy*

We pray for all asylum seekers, particularly those who are kept in detention centres and prisons in this country while their claim is processed. *Lord, in your mercy.*

We pray for those people who have to make decisions about claims for asylum. May they be fair and unprejudiced. Give them compassion and real wisdom. We pray too for those who make the laws and draw up the guidelines about asylum. May they abide by the spirit of international law and be guided by the spirit of truth and justice. *Lord, in your mercy.*

Lighting the candle

Leader: At the beginning of this service we lit a candle. This is traditional at Advent; it is a sign of welcome. In some countries if you light a candle and put it in the window it means you will welcome people into your home. Let's all light our candle from that candle to show the world that we are ready to welcome Christ, who comes to us as a refugee. Everyone should light the candle of someone you don't know, tell each other your name and offer each other a sign of peace.

(Music is played while this happens)

Final blessing and closing hymn.

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