




**ASH
WEDNESDAY**



“Behold, now is a very acceptable time” 2 Cor. 6:2

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

It's an Acceptable Time for WELCOMING REFUGEES!!

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 6: 1-2

*“For (God) says: ‘In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’
Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*

Reflection: Ash Wednesday introduces the Christian community to the Season of Lent by recalling both the challenge of the Hebrew prophet Joel to proclaim a fast, and the teaching of Jesus to pray, fast, and give alms to draw attention to God’s mission, not to ourselves. Combining both scriptures, Paul proclaims that “now is a very acceptable time.” One of the signs of *our* time is the plight of refugees fleeing from violence in both the Middle East and in the Northern Triangle of Central America (including Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador). Are we ready to welcome refugees entering the U.S. no matter their religion or culture or ethnicity? *NOW is a very acceptable time not only to pray for refugees but to fast from fears and biases and give “alms” by way of being a welcoming community.*

Stories of Refugee Welcome:

*The Wilton, CT Interfaith Action Committee will soon partner with a local resettlement organization to welcome a refugee family into a house donated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame on their campus. Six years ago, WI-ACT helped to transition an Iraqi refugee family that is now living in Stamford, CT and doing very well. This new family will likely come from Afghanistan, the Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Sudan or Syria and will live in the home for six months until suitable permanent housing can be found, probably in an urban setting. During that time, the family will be assisted by WI-ACT, composed of Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations, and if all goes well, the organization is open to continue with other refugee families. The house owned by the Sisters has three bedrooms and is fully furnished.

*An Alexandria, VA Presbyterian Church has been welcoming refugee families for several years. The pastor stresses the importance of establishing a relationship first. For example, Yaovi, from Burundi, came to worship at the church so congregants got to know him. A deacon then welcomed Yaovi into his home and Yaovi is now a deacon himself, assisting with other refugees. Housing is offered for a 30-90 day trial period after a relationship is developed. Church members assist with food, clothing, connections to health care, ID cards, and accompaniment. If difficulties arise, the church calls on LIRS (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services) for resources on managing the problem.

Actions:

- Plan with other faith groups for a **Refugee Welcome Dinner** with refugee families in your area. Hear families share their stories and needs, and be linked with churches and community leaders for friendship and support. Learn more at: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2015/10/30/welcome-weekend-resources/>
- Many refugees coming from the Middle East or Africa are Muslims or Coptic Christians. **Establish a relationship with multiple faith background partners in your community.** Register your friendship building or dinner at: <https://www.tfaforms.com/396604>

Prayer for Refugees: (adapted from Lutheran Refugee & Immigration Service, LIRS.org.) Gracious God, there are many in your world today who have been forced from their homes by persecution and violence. Keep them in your constant care, and bring them to a place of safety. Be the Good Shepherd to refugees who are in flight. Be the Loving Father to refugees who have lost home and loved ones. Lead and protect them, be their healer and hiding place. Help us welcome all who seek protection and new hope among us. AMEN.