STUDY GUIDE ON
Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Colonel Richard Munn
Director, International Social Justice Commission
The Salvation Army is gravely concerned for the needs of the millions of people who are refugees and asylum seekers. People are fleeing their homes and countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution. Many of these people have experienced significant grief and trauma, which have potential long-term consequences for their health and well-being.

The Salvation Army recognises that the ability to seek asylum is a basic human right, with all people having the right to life, liberty and security of person. The Salvation Army supports international efforts to eliminate persecution and displacement through the promotion of peace, tolerance, understanding and respect for human life and dignity.

God’s hospitable loving concern for the stranger and foreigner are evident in Scripture and therefore, The Salvation Army contends that individuals and governments should act compassionately and humanely towards persons seeking asylum.

The Salvation Army condemns the actions of people smugglers, human traffickers and others who would seek to gain from the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. The Salvation Army recognises the responsibilities of sovereign nations to control their borders but believes there is also a duty to care for refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, nations working together to address the dire needs of asylum seekers is critical.

The Salvation Army holds that both asylum seekers and refugees should be offered assistance to settle and become contributing members of society as quickly as possible.
INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of time the displacement of people due to hunger, hardship or hostilities is part of our human story. Such people and circumstances are thus intrinsically part of the salvation story.

Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, Jesus, the early church, and many other notables were all refugees. In response, Scripture is forcefully replete with the admonition to ‘care for the alien and foreigner in your midst.’

While displaced people are invariably present somewhere, it is the sheer number of refugees and asylum seekers confronting us in the 21st century that is unparalleled in human history.

Even compassionate international policies are being tested to new limits. Even compassionate Christian responses seem overwhelmed by the magnitude of need. A commonly used word during this time is ‘crisis’.

The evidence seems to suggest that significantly large numbers of refugees will be part of our world for the foreseeable future. We essentially have no choice in the matter and cannot remain unconnected or unaffected. Thus, how we respond and form our views is of critical importance.

CONTEXT

Our world is now experiencing an unprecedented 65 million people on the move. This includes over 21 million refugees. The United Nations estimates that nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution.

The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key international document that defines the term ‘refugee’ and outlines the legal obligations of nation states to protect them. The core principle is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of established international law and nation states are expected to ensure that the rights of refugees are respected and protected.

Refugee – someone who has left their home country to escape war, natural disaster or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality or political opinion and is registered as such.

Asylum Seeker – someone who appears to be a refugee but has not been officially evaluated.

Immigrant – someone who has relocated for whatever reason to a new country.
The top 3 countries displacing refugees are Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Total: 9 million (2017)

The majority of refugees live outside the West, generally in countries next to their homeland. The top 3 countries hosting refugees are Turkey, Pakistan and Lebanon. Total: 5 million (2017)

3 million refugees have been admitted into the USA through the official settlement program between 1980-2016.

The US response to refugees was a major issue in the 2016 Presidential election, and remains a contentious public matter with perceived fears for national security in light of militant terrorism and decreased employment opportunities in a fragile national economy.

The Salvation Army has a respected legacy of serving in refugee camps in Africa, Asia and Europe. Major Eva Den Hartog who served refugees in Bangladesh and Vietnam was described by Billy Graham as a ‘Protestant Mother Theresa.’

From 2013-14 The Salvation Army served in a humanitarian role in the Australian refugee processing centres of Manus and Nauru. In 2015 The Salvation Army established a network of 16 programs across Europe to help process the influx of asylum seekers from North Africa and Syria.

As a respected evangelical movement, renowned for practical hospitality and human care, what principles can guide The Salvation Army in response to the magnitude of this human need?
At a base level, welcoming the stranger is a frequent and clear commandment. And yet, for many the plight of refugees is perceived as a political, cultural and economic issue, rather than a biblical concern.

How can we apply biblical principles to personal faith and public policy?

We can begin by realising that human migration and the presence of displaced people is an ever-present part of the human story, including our ancestors, natural and biblical. We can paraphrase the words of Jesus: ‘You will always have the refugee among you.’ (JN 12:8)

Scholars note 36 references for the people of Israel to care for aliens, frequently joined with the reminder that they also had been aliens in Egypt. The words foreigner, alien, stranger, sojourner or immigrant appear over 100 times in scripture, especially in the Old Testament.

This ethic by the people of Israel is central to their self-awareness. Not only are the key figures of Cain, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Ruth, David and others at some time aliens in a foreign land, but, an entire people, a nation were in such a predicament. This is essentially unprecedented, and happens twice in the national Hebrew story – captivity in Egypt for over 400 years, and exiled in Babylon for 70 years.

The image sets a vision for eventual homecoming, reconciliation and freedom to be consummated in the Kingdom of God.

The history of the New Testament reinforces the motif in the most exclamatory way, at the very beginning – Jesus commences his life as a refugee. The human-interest story is powerful as new parents Mary and Joseph and infant baby flee to Egypt to escape the brutality of a despot. The identity with refugee plight is immediate.

Not only baby Jesus; but an infant church. Refugee dynamics are continued as the fledgling New Testament church scatters during Judean and Roman persecution. The latter includes Aquila and Priscilla fleeing Emperor Claudius and the apostle John banished to the Mediterranean island of Patmos.

A final reinforcement comes with the identification of another people as ‘aliens and strangers in the world.’ (1 PET 2) – the people of God, the church. Our identity is in Christ, our nationhood in Him. The image is simultaneously comforting and affirming, uncertain and fluid.

This is the journey of faith. It sometimes encounters hardship.
Hunger and Horrors

Relocation due to hunger comes early in Genesis. Abraham and family come from the Bedouin wilderness culture of the Ancient Near East and as such are especially susceptible to the stresses of periodic famine. During these times, like many counterparts, they travel to fertile Egypt to alleviate their suffering (GN 12). The brothers of Joseph, who was exiled and is now powerful in Egypt, repeat the same pattern (GN 42).

Another human-interest story prompted by famine is found in the book of Ruth. Naomi, husband and sons leave Bethlehem for Moab. While there one son marries Ruth. Within a decade father and both sons die, leaving three widows. Ruth remains with Naomi who returns to Bethlehem because of the provision of food there. In both locations each woman is either resident or alien.

It is the willing generosity of property owner Boaz to the needy refugee Ruth that redeems the plight and secures the lineage of David. Boaz exemplifies kindness to the refugee; Ruth exemplifies the resourcefulness of the refugee (RU 2).

In addition to the primal search for nourishment, many people are forced to leave their homeland against their will. Once again, the Bible contains such examples.

Joseph is sold by his jealous brothers into slavery and demonstrates remarkable fortitude and survival skills by thriving in Egypt. So much so that he is unrecognised by his brothers when they stand before him asking for food.

Daniel is deported from his homeland to Babylon. He exemplifies both cultural assimilation and principled conviction (DN 1).

Additionally, the cruelties of war and invasion mean that deportees are uprooted en masse and their story, though maybe not as noteworthy as Joseph, Ruth and Daniel are recorded in the Assyrian ransacking of Jerusalem (2 KG). The atrocities are shocking, and archaeologists have unearthed evidence of major people movements from this Biblical time.

Moses and David represent another group; escapees, people for innumerable reasons who find themselves in an alien culture, endangered and disempowered, who have to begin life over again.

These examples from Scripture replicate primary causes for refugees today. Hunger, horrors, deportees and escapees are included a thousand times in the refugee stories of our day and age.

Resilience, ingenuity, resourcefulness, heroism, agony and adaption form the refugee fabric. A sure agent of healing in that regard is the hospitality of the host people. It is desperately needed.
Hospitality and Healing

There is a fascinating contrast between the Egyptian Pharaoh of Genesis (GN 47) who welcomes and hosts the refugee Joseph and the Pharaoh of Exodus (EX1) who confronts and dismisses the refugee Moses. The former benefits from the skills of the refugee; the latter sees the refugee people as a threat to national security and oppresses them. One prospers, the other perishes.

It is abundantly clear that the people of God are exhorted to welcome and serve refugees. The fundamental provision of hospitality to the stranger is not only a high Bedouin cultural value, it expresses a Kingdom ethic.

The word xenophobia (Xeno – foreign; phobia – fear) means ‘fear or hatred of foreigners.’ In quite remarkable contrast, the New Testament Greek word for hospitality is philoxenia (philo – brotherly love; xenia – foreign) – lit. ‘love a foreigner like a brother.’

We might say one Biblical definition of hospitality is to overcome xenophobia and treat a foreigner like a friend. (Johnstone and Merrill – Serving God in the Migrant Crisis)

Examples of hospitality to the foreigner abound in Scripture – Abraham lavishly hosts three ‘strangers’ (GN 18), care is extended to Elisha by the Shunammite couple (2 Kings 4) and the poor widow of Zarephath self-sacrifices as she feeds Elijah (1 Kings 17).

In the New Testament a clear practice of hospitality continues. Jesus is often pictured in someone’s house for a meal, most notably Zacchaeus and the house of a Pharisee. We also see the hospitality ethic in the naturally spontaneous invitation of the two disciples to their unrecognised travelling companion on the road to Emmaus to ‘stay with us’ (LK 25).

Jesus also uses the hospitality of a foreigner – a shunned Samaritan – for one of his most beloved parables and teaching regarding neighbourliness (LK 10). The point is acerbic for the original Jewish audience as the Samaritan stands in contrast to the home religious leaders who offer no hospitality to the invalid traveller.

Some of this is also present when Jesus commends the one ‘foreigner’ out of 10 lepers who returns to give thanks for his healing (LK 17). The message is profound – foreigners are included in the family of God, and may even exceed the host nationality in their devotion and piety.

There is evidence this is so today. Not only are many refugees today in their predicament specifically because of their Christian faith – Syrian and Iraqi refugees – but, there are examples of non-Christian refugees coming to faith in Christ as a response to generous Christian hospitality and advocacy. In the first scenario, hospitality for the persecuted church is one basic way to stand in solidarity with Christian brothers and sisters, the persecuted Christ.

Migrations are a longstanding means by which the Christian church has expanded; at the very least enlivened and stimulated.
‘The nations show up on our doorstep. The mission field has crossed our borders and settled into our communities. Can we see the potential, not just the problems?’

Extending hospitality begins the process of healing for the agony and bewilderment of the refugee; it also brings healing to the benefactor – ‘it is more blessed to give, than to receive.’

We might imagine this applies to hospitable nation, denomination, local congregation and individual family.

Caring for the alien and community health are not mutually exclusive values – indeed, the opposite. Equally, loving our new neighbour – the Syrian, the Sudanese, the Samaritan – does not mean we abandon home values, culture and traditions. Welcoming and resettling the refugee helps those in need, strengthens home and opens an invaluable opportunity to share the gospel.

Social Outcomes

5 top concerns with refugees:

1. They take advantage of our hospitality
2. They include secret terrorists
3. Helping these people just increases the flood
4. They take our jobs
5. They want to change our culture into their own

(Patrick Johnstone – Migrant Crisis)

The trafficking of migrants is a global concern. Organised criminals smuggle vulnerable people across borders and between continents treating them as goods. The safety and lives of asylum-seeking immigrants are invariably at risk – many suffocate in containers, perish in deserts or drown at sea.

Two of the principal smuggling routes – Africa to Europe and S. America to N. America – generate an estimated $6.75 billion a year for criminals. The global figure is likely to be much higher.

Counter to public perception the highest refugee concentrations are actually in some of the poorest countries in the world. The presence of refugees, and demands on a strained economy, services and infrastructure add to the hardship already endured by the local populations. In many instances refugees become an added burden to the development of the host country, which nevertheless can demonstrate quite remarkable patience and kindness (United Nations).

The economic impact of refugees on host areas, however, is not necessarily negative. An economic stimulus can be generated by the presence of refugees and can lead to the development of the host regions. The presence of refugees also contributes to the creation of employment benefiting the local population, directly or indirectly (United Nations).
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

While many Americans believe that refugees and immigrants are a ‘drain’ on the economy, economists almost universally reach a different conclusion – research shows that immigrant refugees can have a net positive impact on the host country. They are consumers, this leads to increased profits and this generates further employment.

Immigrant refugees generally work in areas that complement the home worker, often taking jobs that nationals are either unwilling or unable to do. They can also create wealth and opportunity by bringing new skills and markets into the home economy – i.e. Vietnamese refugees who popularised the walk-in nail salon in the USA, a commodity once only available to the very wealthy.

Refugees are often especially qualified, resilient and entrepreneurial. They do not merely consume, they can produce.

The percentage of refugee immigrants in the USA who either arrive as or become Christians is significantly higher than the Christian percentage of the home US population. (Timothy Tennent, Asbury Seminary President)

American immigration over the past 40 years has bolstered Christian numbers – if anything, making the USA more Christian. (Philip Jenkins – God’s Continent)

UK church attendance is being positively impacted by ethnic minorities, ranging from devout Polish Catholic migrant workers to African and Caribbean Pentecostals.

‘Today’s immigrants to America champion the value of the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620 – they come looking for an opportunity, they tend to come with a strong religious faith, they tend to be moral people who work hard… they not only become Americans themselves, they help America continue to be the nation its founders envisioned.’ (Joseph Castleberry, Northwest University President)

“\nThe arc of scripture can inform the overall policy of a sophisticated international operation, the response of a local corps community of faith and the compassion of an individual family.\n"
1. What is the history of immigration among your ancestors?

2. What are your feelings as you see images of refugees coming to your country, or see foreigners in your neighbourhood?

3. What challenges and benefits to our nation do you see as a result of an influx of refugees?

4. What are your personal experiences in meeting or intersecting with refugees, if any?

5. What is most disturbing and inspiring about the Biblical call to ‘care for the alien in your midst’?

6. How do you think The Salvation Army can respond to the presence of refugees? What can your corps do? What can you do?

Resources

Serving God in a Migrant Crisis, Patrick Johnstone, GMI Press, 2016
Seeking Refuge, Steven Bauman, Matthew Soerens, Issam Smeir, Moody Press, 2016
Christians at the Border, Daniel Carroll, Baker, 2008
Responding to the Refugee Crisis, Christianity Today, 2017

United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - www.unhcr.org/en-us
Salvation Army International Positional Statement – Refugees and Asylum Seekers: www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/positionalstatements
**History**

**GN 11:31-12:9**  
Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. […]

The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. […] So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; […] He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. […] From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. […] Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

**EX 22:21**  
Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.

**EX 23:9**  
Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

**DT 10:18-19**  
He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

**MT 2:13-15**  
An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

**LK 17:17-18**  
Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’

**HEB 11:9**  
By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.
Horrors and Hunger

GN 12:10
Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

LEV 19:9-10
When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner.

RUTH 1:1
In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelech, his wife’s name Naomi […] They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

JER 22:3
This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow.

EZ 22:29
The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.

MAL 3:5
I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me.

LK 10 29-37
Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. […] A Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

 […] Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ […] ‘Go and do likewise.’

ACTS 8:1
‘A great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.'
1 PET 2:9-12
But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Hospitality and Healing

LEV 19:33-34
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.

DT 24:14-15
Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

DT 27:19
Cursed is the one who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.

PS 146:9
The LORD watches over the alien.

IS 56:6-8
[...] Foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

EZ 47:22-23
Aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

ZEC 7:9-10
This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor.’

MT 25:25-36
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, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

GAL 5:14
For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

HEB 13:2
Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.