

40 Days of Prayer—Lenten Focus on Refugees

Week 1: Syria

The current situation: Syria is in its 6th year of a civil war. According to the UN's refugee agency, a quarter of a million people have lost their lives since it began,* and over 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 11 million refugees (6.3 million of them displaced within Syria, and another 4.9 million of whom have fled the country, mostly to neighboring Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt). Between the violence of war and a completely destroyed infrastructure, life within Syria has become a living nightmare for those unable to flee. Meanwhile, countries hosting large numbers of refugees are unable to address the overwhelming humanitarian needs, and anti-refugee tensions have broken out in those countries and around the globe, including the United States.

** The UN stopped independently counting Syrian casualties in 2014. In February 2016 the Syrian Center for Policy Research estimated the number of deaths caused by the conflict, either directly or indirectly, at 470,000.*

How did the conflict start? It began during the “Arab Spring” of 2011, after peaceful pro-democracy revolts toppled regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Similar protests occurred in Syria, fueled by lack of freedom and economic hardship. The Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad responded by killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many more. In July 2011, military defectors sympathetic to the protestors formed the Free Syrian Army, aiming to overthrow the government, and Syria began to slide into civil war. Different factions both within and outside the country allied themselves with either the rebels or the government or pushed their own agenda—most notably ISIS, an extremist militaristic group determined to create a totalitarian fundamentalist Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (hence its acronym ISIS). For short video explanations of the war and the refugee crisis, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxzMa7j6LN0> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w>.

What to pray for:

- Protection for refugees—safe passage across land and sea, protection from those who would harm or take advantage of them, sustenance and rest when they arrive
- Strength for the caregivers—those who give money, time, or space in their homes to help create safe passage and ease of transition for refugees
- Wisdom for world leaders—that they would find ways to help refugees fleeing from war
- Compassion in ourselves and others—asking God to remove any apathy or complacency we may have toward those in need and for God's love to flow through us
- Repentance for those blinded by ideologies of violence—that they might see all people as children of God
- Healing of all wounds—physical, psychological, emotional, and moral

- A peaceful end to the conflict and restoration of homes, schools, healthcare, families and communities

For more information on the Syrian refugee crisis and what you can do to help, see websites for the following agencies: UMCOR (www.umcor.org), UMC General Board of Church and Society (umc-gbcs.org), World Vision (www.worldvision.org), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (www.unhrc.org), and many others.