



**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

**Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)**
In the United States and Canada



Not Terrorists; Not Tourists: Refugees are Human Beings

I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”—Matthew 25:36-40

In the past few days, we have shared in the public and global outpouring of sympathy and support for the victims, their families, and the people of France, Lebanon, and Russia. We reiterate that expression of solidarity, and our condemnation of these acts of violence, all of which have been claimed by the “Islamic State.”

We unequivocally deplore and mourn the senselessness that leads people to believe that violence will bring peace and justice, much less honor or blessing. Whether carried out by non- or quasi-state actors in the name of an ideology or religion, or by states in the name of national security, we have seen repeatedly that the largest numbers of victims are innocent of any crime, and undeserving of any such fate. We are not blind to the real threats that exist in our world. We have seen attacks and assaults perpetrated by individuals and groups, states and coalitions take the lives of many, and destroy the hopes and dreams, aspirations and futures of many more. We, too, desire safety and to be free of fear.

An unfortunate consequence of these attacks is the strident rhetoric of many politicians—including United States mayors, governors, and members of Congress—that effectively calls for the closing of the door and borders to innocent victims of the war in Syria. The Syrian war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our generation, and it has no resolution in sight. More than half the Syrian population has been forcibly displaced from their homes, and more than four million Syrians are now refugees in neighboring Middle Eastern countries and Europe. Over half of Syrian refugees are children. The people of Syria did not choose such horrific suffering. The “Islamic State” and the Asad regime are now the main visible protagonists of the war, but they are surely not the only parties.

Our nation is enriched—indeed it is made what it is—by the great diversity that can be celebrated here: cultures, faiths, and heritages. Recognizing the enormity of the Syrian crisis, our churches around the nation have prayed, extended care, and advocated for allowing more refugees from Syria—and in fact more refugees and potential immigrants generally—to be welcomed. In seeking such a welcome, we assert our faith commitments to “love the sojourner” (Deuteronomy 10:19) and to treat “the foreigner residing among you...as your native-born” (Leviticus 19:34). We likewise continue to advocate for negotiated steps to end the root cause of the Syrian and Middle Eastern refugee crisis—the Syrian war. We stand firmly behind those positions.

It is tragic that our country continues to witness the scapegoating and systematic collective punishment that it has known in the past. During World War II, those of Japanese heritage were interned. In former eras it was Catholics, Jews, and repeatedly Asians who were refused entry or inclusion into our immigrant nation. Today we watch still as a new manifestation of Jim Crow leads to the mass incarceration of great numbers of African-Americans. We have experienced how fear and suspicion lead to institutionalized discrimination and systematic dehumanization of whole communities.

We are appalled by the punitive and discriminatory rhetoric and actions by many political leaders to restrict and deny the admission of Syrian refugees because they are Syrian, or because they are Muslim. Such attitudes are contrary to our understanding of our nation's values; and to our reading of our sacred scriptures. Such restrictions and limitations only make the displaced Syrian population doubly victimized: victims of the violence of war, and victims of the violence of hatred and bigotry.

We aspire to something greater than this. We celebrate the human community. We recognize evil in the world, but the answer is not to shut out whole populations collectively; we know that each and every one of us could be excluded based on some aspect of identity. Refugees are already the most heavily scrutinized entrants to our nation, subjected to multiple and repeated security screenings. Such safeguards are essential, should be adequately supported, and should be efficiently managed. The US should continue offering welcome to the world's most vulnerable peoples, including refugees from Syria.

The condemnation of these attacks by American and global Muslim leaders, clergy, and scholars is absolutely consistent with what we know and have experienced from many decades of interreligious engagement in the US, the Middle East and in the Muslim-majority world. Our partnerships in Syria and frequent interaction with Syrians has enabled us to know and share in the humanity of the Syrian people—their joys and sadness, their hopes and dreams, and the wish for a better future.

We are called to be a merciful and caring community; to seek justice and to honor every person; and to stand up and shout out when such a vision is challenged or violated. We urge caution and caring in our discourse and in our actions, so that we all may hold ourselves to a higher standard and ideal.

A joint statement of the leadership of the
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