



## BE NOT AFRAID: Seeing God in Every Refugee



By Mike Hoey

Families around the globe are fleeing for their lives, just like the Holy Family fled Bethlehem to escape King Herod's bloody regime. This unprecedented migration has special poignancy as Christmas approaches, a joyous time when families reunite, something not possible for many exiled from their native land.

Not since the end of World War II have so many people been displaced, 60 million worldwide. From the Syrian conflict alone, some 10 million have lost their homes and 4 million have fled the country. Neighboring countries are overwhelmed. Lebanon has a population of about 4 million, yet it has taken in 1 million Syrian refugees. Turkey and Jordan are similarly under stress.

Europe, especially Germany, is seeing a large and desperate in-migration of Middle Eastern refugees. Meanwhile, the United States, whose military missions to stabilize the Middle East so often seem to have the opposite effect, is geographically removed from the region and many Americans are wary of accepting refugees. The U.S. has agreed to accept only 10,000 Syrian refugees, an exceedingly modest commitment compared to the burden being shouldered by poor countries in the Middle East.

If the war in Syria ever ends, as surely it will someday, many refugees will no doubt return home. But returning home is not an option now and may not be for many years; hence the need for international aid, especially to the poorer countries bordering Syria. Not all of the refugees can be accommodated

by these countries, however, which is where legal migration to wealthier nations like the U.S. can help.

The only other option is to let refugee families, including children, languish in barren, sun-baked resettlement camps. And the longer families stay in these makeshift camps, the more young girls can be lured into prostitution and the more young men can be recruited into armed bands, the latter a possible step to radicalization. It is in no nation's interest, except the Islamic State, to allow these camps to become permanent "homes."

For the 10,000 Syrians who will be considered for resettlement in the U.S., a gauntlet of security clearances must be obtained from the FBI, the National Center on Counterterrorism, and the Department of Homeland Security. The process can take two years to complete. Syrian refugees undergo more rigorous security checks than any other refugees and much more than those entering the U.S. on student and family visas. Yet some Americans want to slam the door on these refugees, especially those of the Muslim faith.

Pope Francis is aware of the suspicion many harbor toward Muslim refugees, but he is nevertheless calling on Catholics to open their doors to these migrants. The Holy Father is following in the barefoot steps of Mother Teresa of Calcutta who said: "I see God in every human being." The Pope's call to welcome the stranger seeks to summon forth the tradition of gracious hospitality found in all three great monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Christians recall that the Holy Family were refugees, but right from the start God's Chosen people were on the run, sojourning for 40 years in the desert and later being expelled from Judah, exiles lamenting their lost homeland: "By the waters of Babylon/ there we sat down and wept/when we remembered Zion." (Ps 137: 1)

The Hebrew Scriptures remind the people of this tragic past and call for compassion to those who suffer a similar fate: "You must not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels, for you have lived in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 23:9)

The life of Abraham, who is revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, offers lessons in hospitality. Abraham, sitting at the entrance of his tent in the shimmering heat of a desert day, raises his eyes and sees three men. It is the Lord, the narrator of Genesis tells us, but Abraham does not know this. Yet Abraham is quick to offer aid to the weary travelers: "Let a little water be fetched and bathe your feet and stretch out under the tree, and let me fetch a morsel of bread, and refresh yourselves."

The Gospels continue this theme of welcoming the stranger: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome..." (Matthew 25: 35-40). Christians throughout the ages have taken to heart this admonition, sometimes at great risk, such as those who hid Jews from the Gestapo during the Second World War.

Taking in the stranger can be risky and inconvenient, but safe and convenient lives are not the narrow way offered by Christ. "Be Not Afraid." That is what Jesus says to his disciples as He approaches their storm-tossed boat. The disciples think they are seeing a ghost, but it is the Lord. Some now see the Syrian refugees as ghosts, or terrorists in secular terms. This is just what the terrorists want us to think; their goal is to create fear and hate.

If we close our doors to refugees, ISIS wins. We let them define who we are. This is a defining moment for our country. Will we save families fleeing from the violence and beheadings, or will we close the door and leave them easy prey for terrorists? Many years ago the people of France gave us the Statue of Liberty. It was a gift meant to signify what is best about America and Americans, our courage in defending freedom and welcoming the stateless from war-torn countries. It is time to step up and be our best, both as people of faith and as Americans. Be Not Afraid!

*Mike Hoey is the executive director for the MCC*

## What is a refugee?

A refugee is someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

*U.S. Department of State*

Missouri Bishops' statement on Syrian refugees

## Catholic Churches Play a Major Part in Resettling Refugees



*CCCNMO Columbia Office Manager Senad Music poses with a group of refugees Catholic Charities helped resettle in Missouri.*

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is one of nine nonprofit organizations nationwide that contracts with the federal government to resettle refugees that have been vetted and given security clearance. [The Catholic Resettlement network](#) includes over 100 diocesan offices across the country and in Guam and Puerto Rico.

Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri (CCCNMO) resettled over 170 refugees in 2014, and expects to settle over 200 this year. Refugees are resettled using federal funds provided by Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. State Department. Services provided include: housing, English language instruction, and assistance in job training and placement.

Refugees accepted in recent years come from Bosnia, Burma, the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Some of the Iraqi refugees served as interpreters for the U.S. Army during the Iraq war and could no longer live safely in Iraq. No Syrian refugees have been placed by CCCNMO yet and probably won't be for several years.

[Catholic Near East Welfare Association \(CNEWA\)](#)

"Founded by Pope Pius XI in 1926, CNEWA works for, through and with the Eastern Catholic churches to identify needs and implement solutions.

From forming priests to serve the people of God in Egypt to providing irrigation to farmers in southern Lebanon — from teaching needy children in Ethiopia to educating sisters in India — from providing emergency relief to Syrian Christian refugees to counseling for war-scarred children in Gaza, CNEWA connects you to your brothers and sisters in need. Together, we build up the church, affirm human dignity, alleviate poverty, encourage dialogue — and inspire hope."

*—statement from CNEWA website*



# I AM AN IMMIGRANT

BY ALINE KULTGEN

I am an immigrant to this country. This is clearly not much of a distinction because aside from our indigenous population, and that is an important aside, we are a nation of immigrants, are we not? All of us are either immigrants or the children of immigrants or the grandchildren of immigrants and so on. Our families came at different times and for different reasons and despite not always having been welcomed with open arms, we as immigrants have become Americans and all of us have contributed to making this country the vibrant, progressive country that we dreamed of.

I am French by birth, the offspring of a Jewish, Ukrainian refugee mother and a Jewish, Palestinian father who came to France to study medicine. I was born just before the Second World War, and I lost my mother to natural causes in 1940, just as the German blitzkrieg into France was taking place. It was followed by a rapid Armistice and war-long occupation. My father was active in the Resistance in Lyon. On August 1, 1944 he was arrested by the Gestapo along with the group he led. One of his couriers was a Gestapo plant and she betrayed all of them. They were interrogated at Gestapo Headquarters in Lyon and imprisoned at Montluc. On August 20, 1944, just days before Lyon was liberated by the Allies, my father and 119 other prisoners - resisters, Jews and hostages - were taken to a deserted guard house in a nearby town cemetery and machine gunned, six at a time in the house which was then drenched with gasoline and set on fire.

My father's sister had followed him to France to study art and she and her French husband were taking care of me in Le Puy while my father worked in the Resistance in Lyon about 150 kilometers away. I remained with them and they adopted me after we immigrated to the United States in 1947 when I was nine years old. I know that I was fortunate to have survived these black years in France and I know that it was in large part as a result of their love and care. Thousands of French Jewish children were not so lucky and they suffered horrendously under the German occupation, many were separated from their parents never to see them again, and many were sent to Auschwitz and did not return.

Before 1939, my family had hoped to immigrate to the United States as they saw the clouds of war approaching. Unfortunately they were not able to do so and revisited the possibility after the war, now facing the widespread despair and hardships of post war France. And they made the decision that immigration to the United States would give me and all of us a better life and future. And so we came to America in June of 1947.

The America I cherish most certainly lived up to its ideals



Watch Aline  
recount her  
story here



*Left: Aline De Boton, now Aline Kultgen, circa 1944 in France. Top right: Yves and Ester De Boton, parents of Aline, shortly before or after her birth. Bottom right: Aline Kultgen in her Columbia, Missouri home.*


*"On August 20, 1944, just days before Lyon was liberated by the Allies, my father and 119 other prisoners - resisters, Jews and hostages - were taken to a deserted guard house in a nearby town cemetery and machine gunned..."*

in the experience of my family. When we arrived in California, the friends who sponsored us were there for us, they let us settle in with them for a few months and then helped us find a house. Until my adoptive father could learn English he was unable to resume his profession as a clinical biochemist, instead hauling cases of wine at the City of Paris department store in San Francisco, and my adoptive mother gave French lessons. It wasn't easy, but there was opportunity for those who were willing to work hard to take advantage of it, and this we did as immigrants have always done. My adoptive father eventually became the head of the laboratory of Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley and my adoptive mother was able to become the artist she always wanted to be. I don't have any recollection of anyone discriminating against us in any way despite our Jewish background and despite being new immigrants not in complete control of English. On the contrary I have many vivid memories of getting special treatment from my teachers and my classmates. So my parents were and I am grateful to have been given this chance at a new life in a wonderful country, and I fervently hope we will give this same opportunity to the victims of civil war and ISIS.

## The Holy Father Calls for Peace Between Muslim and Christians in the Central African Republic

Pope Francis addressed the Muslim community of the Central African Republic during his recent visit. An excerpt of his remarks, below, show his encouragement of acceptance, peace, and harmony between the members of the Christian and Islamic faith.

“Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters. We must therefore consider ourselves and conduct ourselves as such. We are well aware that the recent events and acts of violence which have shaken your country were not grounded in properly religious motives. Those who claim to believe in God must also be men and women of peace... Together, we must say no to hatred, no to revenge and no to violence, particularly that violence which is perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God himself. God is peace, *God salam*.”



*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses  
yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your  
teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless,  
tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside  
the golden door!"*

## The Refugee Crisis by the Numbers

# 60,000,000

INTERNATIONALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

# 10,000,000

DISPLACED BY SYRIAN CONFLICT

# 4,000,000

SYRIAN REFUGEES LIVING OUTSIDE  
SYRIA'S BORDERS

# 1,000,000

SYRIAN REFUGEES  
IN LEBANON

# 630,000

SYRIAN REFUGEES  
IN JORDAN

# 10,000

SYRIAN REFUGEES  
U.S. WILL ACCEPT