



*“A Person who, owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”* Definition of refugee from the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and Protocol

My earliest experience working with refugees was as a young child when my church sponsored Polish refugees fleeing the USSR. I vividly remember visiting the family and playing with their young children, who spoke no English. And then, just a short time later, visiting them again and being surprised to find that the children did speak English. Later, as an adult, I discovered that children can, in fact, learn a new language in a matter of weeks and months. People, of all ages, immersed in any new language gain proficiency with surprising speed.

It takes much, much longer to recover from the traumas of war and the loss of *everything*. We know that women and children are flooding out of Ukraine. Their husbands, fathers, and sons are remaining behind to defend their homes. Some are doing so voluntarily – others are being forcibly detained by Ukrainian military. People who had jobs and homes just two months ago are now separated from loved ones and sheltering in schools and churches. They are refugees.

I know a good many of you want to help. In February, when Russia originally invaded Ukraine, Lutheran Disaster Response immediately started working with Lutheran churches in Ukraine and surrounding countries to get assistance to people remaining to fight and those fleeing for their lives. They are still doing that work. I also know, though, that the work of finding long-term solutions is much more complicated. The Lutheran Church also has a national organization dedicated to that work: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services.

The Ukrainians are joining a world-wide refugee population of 82.4 million people. Like Afghans, Syrians, and many others, they will face the hardest decisions of their lives: to remain sheltering in place in the hope that war will end; to return to their home country; or apply to be resettled in a new country. The USA may be an option for those choosing to resettle, but over the past few years, the network of refugee resettlement programs has been underfunded and disbanded. Organizations like LIRS and GERA (local to North New Jersey) will need all the support they can get.

Refugees need help with basic needs. They need to learn English well enough to get a job and provide for their children. Too often they are single-parent households. And, even more tragically, they are children whose parents have been lost. As Jesus followers, we are required to care about them (Matthew 25:35; Luke 10: 29 & 37). We are required to provide practical care as we are able. For all those things over which we have no control, we must remember that we are not alone in this work.

Ultimately, it is God’s reign that we pray will come. God alone can bring an end to the brokenness. Let us pray both for the broken and an end to the breaking. Let us pray that our world leaders will do God’s will. Let us pray that we ourselves will follow the way of Christ in caring for our neighbor. Amen