

# Study, Service and Worship Material for Disciples Women's Groups

## Bosnian and Croatian Refugees & Displaced Persons



A Resource for Disciples  
Women from DHM's  
Refugee and Immigration  
Ministries Program



**Refugee and Immigration Ministries**

## Study

### The former Yugoslavia:

During various periods of history, the area of Europe that became Yugoslavia was influenced by many different cultures – the Illyrians, the Celts, the Romans, Byzantium, the Hungarians, the Tartars, the Ottoman Turks, the Venetians, the Austrians, the Greeks, the Bulgarians, the Albanians, the Germans, and the Italians. Yugoslavia, which was created in 1918, was also made up of different cultures. It consisted of the following six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia (which included the autonomous



provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina). Within the context of the European continent (where homogeneity of persons is often what binds countries together), the variety of people who called Yugoslavia home led to much conflict and distrust over many years.

The religious beliefs of the people were also usually dictated by their ethnic background. For example, Croatians comprised a majority of the 30 percent of the population who are Catholic; Serbians comprised most of the 50 percent that are Eastern Orthodox; and people from Macedonia and Kosovo comprised the largest part of the nine percent that are Muslim. One percent was Protestant and the other 10 percent were other or no religion.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (*hereafter referred to simply as Bosnia*) was the only republic of former Yugoslavia established on a geographical/historical basis rather than on an ethnic one. Bosnian refers to someone who lives in Bosnia, not to a religious or ethnic group. Before the war, Bosnia's population was approximately 44 percent Muslim, 31 percent Serbian, and 17 percent Croatian, along with a smattering of Roma (Gypsies), Albanians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Italians.



Destruction in Bosnian village

(Photo: J. Riggs)

In 1944, Tito's partisans liberated Belgrade from the Nazi and established a communist regime in Yugoslavia. For many years, President Tito was able to hold the various parts of Yugoslavia together, but after his death in 1980 the country started to disintegrate. Tito left a system for the rotation of government positions among the various republics, but this system began to fall apart without Tito's personal authority to settle questions of the allocation of resources to the republics.

At the end of the 1980s, Slovenia began its drive for secession, with Croatia not far behind, and on June 25, 1991, Croatia and Slovenia proclaimed independence from Yugoslavia. The government of Serbia responded with a call for a Greater Serbia – the union of all Serbs in Yugoslavia within one contiguous state. Serb forces overran 30 percent of Croatian territory.



Sarajevo Olympic soccer field – now a cemetery

(Photo: J. Riggs)

Bosnia tried to remain outside the conflict but was unable to do so, and on March 3, 1992, Bosnia proclaimed independence. Serbia began a process of "ethnic cleansing" – a form of genocide aimed at eradicating non-Serbs from large sections of Bosnia in order to achieve eventual political union with Serbia. Serb forces seized 70 percent of the country's territory and lay siege to Sarajevo.

In July of 1992, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began a three and one half year airlift into Sarajevo, which became the longest-running humanitarian air bridge in history. At the height of the conflict, agencies were helping as many as 3.5 million people throughout the former Yugoslavia.

In July of 1995, Srebrenica (one of several regions in Bosnia designated by the UN as "safe areas") fell to Serb forces. Around 7,000 men and boys were slaughtered in the worst single incident in Europe since World War II. Other safe areas survived.

With the signing of the Dayton Agreement and the Peace Accords at the end of 1995, the conflict in Bosnia came to an end, and the way was paved for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia resulted in the death of more than 250,000 people, forced one million to become refugees, and internally displaced one million – all of this within a country of just over 23 million people. It would be less than three years before fighting would again erupt – this time in Serbia's southern Kosovo province between ethnic Albanians and Serbs.



Destroyed Bosnian House  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

Although more than 60 percent of houses in Bosnia were damaged or destroyed during the war, the need to build a large number of special camps for refugees and displaced persons did not arise. The resilience of individuals and solidarity among communities played a decisive role. A significant number of families shared their homes with internally displaced persons, while refugees received temporary protection in numerous host countries. Those that could not be accommodated in homes were placed in schools, barracks, and hotels. These group facilities were referred to as “collection centers.”

### 1996 visit to Bosnia and Croatia:

Jennifer Riggs, Director of Refugee and Immigration Ministries, traveled to Croatia and Bosnia as part of a Church World Service (CWS) delegation in 1996, shortly after the war. The delegation met with many Croatian and Bosnian governmental officials, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and refugees and displaced persons in collection centers in both countries. At that time, it was obvious that non-governmental organizations, including CWS would need to play an important role in the rehabilitation and recovery of Bosnia and its society, as well in the resettlement of those refugees who could not easily return to their homeland.



Damaged Red Cross Building  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

The International Committee of the Red Cross was supervising the release of detainees and checking the conditions of those still detained. It was also doing tracing of those still listed as missing – 15,000 in Bosnia; 2,500 in Croatia; and 2,000 in Serbia.

The following is a portion of Jennifer's reflections on her visit in 1996:

*For two weeks in July, I was part of a CWS delegation that visited Croatia and Bosnia to learn more about the situation there. As it so happened, I celebrated my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday while I was there. In the United States, persons who are approaching 50 years of age often do so with many misgivings about growing old. I too had a few of those feelings as I approached my birthday, but they were quickly put aside by my experiences on the trip.*

*How can worries about growing old be of any concern when one has seen and heard what I saw and heard on this trip! To grow old is a privilege that many people in the former Yugoslavia will never have. To grow old in the area in the country in which you were born is a privilege that even more former Yugoslavians will never have. So far, very few refugees or displaced persons have been able to return to their homes.*

*In many ways I felt like I was in Europe at the end of World War II – the destruction of buildings and of people's lives was overwhelming. I met refugees and displaced persons everywhere I went. I heard horror stories of the war. I heard both the sadness and hatred in people's voices when they spoke of what their former neighbors had done to them.*

*One's first impressions come from what one sees. In Sarajevo, I saw thousands of windows with broken glass, due to artillery fire. A year after the firing had stopped many of the windows have still not been replaced, and shattered glass can be seen everywhere.*



Damaged windows of UNHCR headquarters  
(UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

*In the countryside, I saw homes flattened by bombs and people trying to live in buildings they had patched back together as best they could. In Tuzla, I saw people trying to grow vegetables in any open space between buildings. In Mostar, I saw a person laying flowers near a wooden marker in a former town park which had become a convenient burial ground.*

*What makes the biggest impression, however, is what one hears from the people themselves. I heard how people risked their lives to go out for water during the siege of Sarajevo and then had to climb countless flights of stairs to reach their homes at the top of their high rise apartment buildings. I heard a woman tell me how she had used a shoe to bake a pie for a special celebration. I heard a mother tell me why her 11-year-old daughter has not spoken in four years. The young girl was standing by a neighbor when he was beheaded; the head rolled on the ground at the feet of the little girl.*

*I visited a women's center that is struggling to help Croatian women who have faced domestic violence due, in part, to the frustrations of the men in their families who see no hope for productive jobs for themselves anytime soon.*

*In the midst of the suffering that continues to go on in the former Yugoslavia, it is good to know that we as Disciples are helping – through our contributions to Week of Compassion, through the giving of blankets and kits to CWS, and through the resettlement of those who are not able to stay in the area.*

*Fifty years from now, some Disciples' member born this year will probably be celebrating his or her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in Europe. My prayer is that that person will discover that CWS is not needed in Europe anymore!*



CWS blankets in Croatia  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

Croatia:

The damage done by the war in Croatia amounted to about \$27 billion and there were about three million land mines still hiding in the ground. At the time of the visit, there were 100,000 displaced persons in Croatia and 180,000 refugees (80 percent of whom were Bosnian Croats). They were nine percent of the population, and 512 collection centers had to be established to house them. Each collection center held 10 to 4,000 people.

Seventy-six percent of the Bosnian refugees in Croatia lived in private accommodations. They received canned meat, flour, oil and sugar during the war, but that assistance from the Croatian government was running out, just as their savings were being depleted. The unemployment rate in Croatia was 17

percent, and the Bosnians were trying to decide if they should return home to nothing, since government subsidies were coming to an end.

In Zagreb, refugees from Bosnia were being interviewed for resettlement in the United States. Those being accepted for resettlement were mainly Bosnians referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (in many cases because of ethnically-mixed marriages that made it difficult for them to fit in with any one ethnic group) and Bosnian Muslims with relatives in the United States. The United States had decided to take up to 15,000 persons that year. One family of five that had that day been accepted for resettlement in the United States talked with the delegation asking questions about what life would be like in the United States.

On the outskirts of Zagreb was the Spansko collection center where displaced Croatians from Vukovar were sheltered. Many women there had managed to escape with their children from the brutality of fighting in Vukovar, and they had horrible stories to share about their escape and the loss of husbands, fathers, and brothers. Many were still awaiting word on missing husbands and relatives. This is where the delegation met the little girl that had not spoken in four years. Yet in the midst of the trauma the displaced Croatians had experienced, the daily life in the collection center showed signs of hope. There were flower and vegetable gardens tended by the residents, and the delegation was hosted in the “summer house” of a couple who had constructed a home in their garden from scrap lumber in order to get out of the dormitory for at least the summer season.



Summer house at Spansko  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

Bosnia:

At the time of the visit, only two percent of the Bosnian economy was functioning. Because of the connection between ethnicity and religion in Bosnia, many places of worship were destroyed during the war – 1010 mosques, 470 Catholic churches and 10 Orthodox churches.

In Mostar, the Neretva River divided the eastern and western parts of the city – the Muslim Bosnians from the Catholic Croats. A very famous bridge built by the Ottoman Turks in 1566 spanned the river and was a World Heritage site. It was the symbol of the connection between the two ethnic groups and religions, and was a particularly poignant symbol of the country’s change from one that tried to build bridges of understanding among the various ethnic groups to one that sought the elimination of ethnic groups. (See the story about the refugees resettled by Jeffersonstown Christian Church below for further details about the bridge.)



Mostar Bridge in 1996 – two views  
(Photos: J. Riggs)





Reconstructed Mostar Bridge today – once again a symbol of the connection between ethnic groups (Photo: A. Gopp)

The delegation visited a collective center for the elderly and mentally ill in Mostar. During the war, the elderly and handicapped were often abandoned as people fled for their lives. They lived on the streets during the worst of the bombing in Mostar. This center, with the help of a former mental health worker, was now caring for the elderly that had been left behind. They were also trying to locate relatives. The delegation also visited the Church of Saints Peter and Paul to thank them for their help with the elderly and handicapped. This church cooperated with Church World Service during the war to distribute high energy food, blankets and underclothes to the elderly. The Sanctuary of the church had been completely destroyed, but the attached monastery was mostly unharmed.

In Sarajevo, the delegation also toured the city to see the devastation shown in some photos here. Later in the afternoon the delegation went up into the hills overlooking the city to have supper with the Ilijas family. They had fled from Srebrenica and were now living in the home of someone that had fled from Sarajevo. During the war, more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were massacred at Srebrenica, the worst genocide in Europe since World War II. More than a thousand human remains have been identified and interred in the memorial cemetery at Srebrenica.

When the Serbs entered the hills overlooking Sarajevo, the people living there fled and the Serb military took over the area so they could fire on the city down in the valley. There was a bunker near the house where the Ilijas family was living and also an unexploded land mine. The Serb military had lived in the house that the Ilijas family now lived in.



The Ilijas family  
(Photo: J. Riggs)

The Ilijas family was typical with what was happening all over Bosnia. Often when the real owners of the property returned, they now found other refugees living in their house. Sometimes those refugees had invested money and time making repairs on the home and when the owners returned they faced the need for negotiations on how all of that would be handled. It was also going to take a long time to work out the property rights in some situations where no one really knew if the owners had survived.

In talking with the family, members of the delegation asked them what they most needed. The grandfather said that what he needed was a cow. He had been a farmer all his life and he couldn't imagine life in the future without farming. He wanted a cow. He was the inspiration for a whole program that got established by CWS in Bosnia to provide cows to farmers with the encouragement that they share the milk with neighbors and pass on the cow's offspring to another family.

The delegation visited "Our Children," a local organization that helped children, in the town of Zenica. Throughout the war, Our Children distributed high energy foods, shoes, under clothing, school kits, and health kits donated by CWS. During the delegation's visit, layettes were distributed to some of the

pregnant women in the area. They expressed so much appreciation for such a small amount of what they would need to care for their babies that it showed the delegation the desperate needs they really had. In Tuzla, the delegation visited “Children Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” who took them to the Jezevac collection center located on the road to Banovici which contained people who fled Srebrenica and Bratunac – mostly elderly women and men and mothers with children who lost their husbands. They told stories of the extreme disappointment they felt by the lack of protection they had received from the United Nations which was to guarantee the Srebrenica as a “safe area.” They told of seeing their husbands, brothers and sons executed before their eyes in the final collapse of the city. They expressed dismay that they seemed to be forgotten and received little attention. The women expressed that they found the future extremely bleak without their husbands and fathers.



Graves of those killed at Srebrenica  
(Photo: Week of Compassion Seminararians Trip, 2006)

In Banovici (near Tuzla) the delegation experienced the joy of a CWS school kit distribution. Forty-eight cartons of school kits had been sent by CWS and they were distributed to 270 children who were students that came from the collection centers in the vicinity. The excitement on the children’s faces was overwhelming and they ran around looking inside each other’s school kit to see what they had received.



Students receive  
their school kits  
(Photos: J. Riggs)



### **Bosnians in the United States:**

Until the disintegration of Yugoslavia began, very few Bosnians had entered the United States. However, some had come as “Yugoslavs.” Most of these Bosnians were ethnically Serb or Croat, and they generally settled quickly into long-established immigrant communities founded by people from their same ethnic group. Bosnian Muslims were so few in number in the United States that there was no Bosnian Muslim community. Now there are Bosnian Muslims in many states.

Douglass Boulevard Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, shared the following:

When 11-year-old Tarik Mandzo and his sister, Selma, six, arrive in Louisville, they hadn’t played outside in two years. In their native Bosnia, where sniper bullets and exploding shells can rain down without warning, their parents knew the danger in allowing them to play outside. When they arrived in Louisville and stayed with a church family for a few days, they could not be kept inside, even in the rain!

Jasmine, the father, received serious injuries in sniper fire. While he was hospitalized in Bosnia, Serbian soldiers came to his hometown and killed many of his friends. His wife and children were able to escape to Sarajevo where they lived in primitive conditions. Their home and village and mosque were burned by the Serbs. At the University of Louisville Medical School Jasmine’s hand was rebuilt.

After the arrival of the Mandzo family, they helped our church also sponsor the widow of a doctor, her parents and her children. The doctor had saved the life of Jasmine when they were in Bosnia. Jasmine had been present when the doctor was shot and killed, so the families were very close.

First Christian Church in Glasgow, Kentucky, shared the following:

Senad Trcic, his wife Fikreta and their daughter Behija arrived in Glasgow after their flight from persecution and fright. They had come originally from Bosnia, then on through Croatia to resettle through the valiant efforts of Church World Service....

Before arriving with only the clothes on their backs, two duffle bags and one stuffed animal, they had spent six months in a large refugee camp in Zagreb, Croatia having fled from their home in Banja Luka, Bosnia. Forever in my memory, I shall hear the ring of some of the first words this father uttered with the help of an interpreter: "Will I make enough money so my child will not starve?"



First Christian Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, resettled this Bosnian family who celebrated the new life they have received in the United States thanks to the church. (Photo: First Christian Church)

First Christian Church in Bellingham, Washington, shared the following:

Our church had recently decided to sponsor a refugee family from Bosnia. A Bosnian family (the Babics) who had been living in Bellingham for about six months contacted us about sponsoring friends of theirs who were refugees from Bosnia currently living in Austria. About the same time the CWS office in Seattle contacted us about the same family, the Ilics.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, I was driving out Sunset Drive and noticed a Christmas tree still up. I thought that there was a real procrastinator; even worse than I am. I went on by and mentioned to my wife that someone still had their Christmas tree up. We thought it a little strange and then didn't think any more about it.

The Ilics arrived after traveling from Vienna to Bellingham in a day. We had made arrangements for them to stay with the Babics for a few nights. After getting their luggage they went directly to the Babic's apartment. I got their address so I could make contact the next day.

As I started out Sunset Drive the next day to find the Babic's apartment I came to the complex where I had seen the Christmas tree a week or so earlier. It was still up. I drove into the complex looking for the apartment number and found it to be the Christmas tree apartment.

After greeting everyone and talking for a few minutes, I had to ask why the tree was still up. Sonja Babic explained: "you know we have been in a country where we were not permitted to celebrate Christmas, let alone have a tree. So now I can, and I'm leaving it up the whole month of January as a reminder of our freedom and my country where I could not."

She went on to tell me that they would go to her grandmother's house outside of Sarajevo to celebrate Christmas in hiding. Her grandmother would have a very small tree that they would all gather around. "Now," she said, "I can have a big tree and celebrate openly in my new home and country."

Nicholasville Christian Church in Nicholasville, Kentucky, shared the following:

Our church agreed to sponsor a family four from Bosnia who was related to another family that had been sponsored by Lancaster Christian Church in Lancaster, Kentucky. When the family arrived on May 15, the congregation put them up in a motel for their first night in the United States. During the night, the motel was hit by a tornado and the roof was taken off. At first the family thought they were being bombed. Bosnia doesn't have tornadoes and they didn't know it was the weather that had taken off the roof.



Downey Avenue Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, resettled this Bosnian family. The church was impressed with the courage and strength of the family in surviving the war but additionally impressed by that courage and strength when the mother pulled her own tooth that was hurting shortly after their arrival. *(Photo: Downey Ave. Christian Church)*

Jeffersontown Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, shared the following:

We went to the Louisville airport on February 1 expecting to meet two Bosnians. What we found was a man (Elvir) and wife (Aida) from Mostar, a ravaged city where people live huddled in basements and cellars in the Muslim Old City. They told a story of war and cruelty – but also of three other relatives who had traveled with them from Europe but had been separated in New York and sent to a new home in Idaho. So our church decided to sponsor the additional three people – Aida's sister and her family.

Alisa carries with her a picture book of Mostar before the fighting, a beautiful place lined by hills and famous for a 16<sup>th</sup> century stone bridge over the Neretva River, a structure long considered a marvel of Ottoman engineering design. Hearts shattered across Bosnia when it fell to Croatian shelling last October.

For the people of Mostar, there really were two sieges. On April 4, 1992, in the early stages of the fighting in Bosnia, the Serbian army attacked the city. The attack came without warning, and Muslims and Croats – ordinary people, not professional soldiers – joined in defense of their city.

For close to three months, Elvir and his brother-in-law fought back, first on the streets and later in the hills surrounding the city. Even after the Serbs pulled back they continued to bombard the city with long-range artillery.

Then on May 9, 1993, Bosnian Croat forces attacked Mostar. At 2:00 AM, the Croatian Militia just started knocking on the door and expelling people from their homes, not even allowing them to dress. Thousands, including Aida's sister's family, were forced into concentration camps.

The refugees stress that this is not a fight over religion but a battle fueled by lust to acquire power and property. In Mostar, they say, Croats used the Muslims to help push the Serbs out, then turned on the Muslims in an attempt to grab more land for themselves. But that is not the whole story either. When the Croats attacked Mostar, Aida and Elvir were sheltered by a Croatian friend who hid them and other Muslims in his home at great personal risk. Later, Muslim men from ages 16 to 60 were gathered into camps.

Ultimately the Croats extended a cruel offer. Muslims could be released from the camps – but only if they agreed to leave their homeland and move abroad, given freedom in exchange for ethnic cleansing. The two families we are resettling accepted that offer.

First Christian Church in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, shared the following:

Our church assisted a family from Bosnia that wanted to resettle in Columbus, Ohio near friends. In addition to the money we provided, the youth group wrote letters to the one young girl that spoke English. Tatjana, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader, answered with the following:

"Before war we lived in one small town in central Bosnia. All our friends and family lived in that town too. We spent every day together, weekends in our weekend house 15 miles from town, and every summer we spent 10 to 15 days on sea-side. My sister and I had a beautiful childhood. When war is start everything is changed. Our childhoods are broken off. There were no games and playing outside like before. We were always in fear from bomb-shells and most of time we were in basements, hiding from bombs. Every day somebody died. We didn't have electricity and water. We didn't even have enough food to eat. We have hardly enough bread and things like sugar, coffee or chocolate were out of reach, not only for my family, it was for all the town. Our life was reduced on fighting to survive."



First Christian Church in Morehead, Kentucky, resettled this Bosnian family who were delayed in their arrival by strong cross winds. Their plane was diverted to Cincinnati and they were bused from there to the Lexington airport – all of this after a long day of travel and while not being able to speak or understand any English. (Photo: First Christian Church)

Vine Street Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, shared the following:

The refugee we are sponsoring suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome and has received therapy at the Vine Street Counseling Center. We are helping him file the necessary papers to bring his wife and son to join him. Some of the story of his experiences, in his own words, is:

"In 1992, the war in Bosnia started. My house was burned and destroyed. I moved with my wife and son from Bihac to Mala Kladusa. On July 5, 1994, my mother was killed in her house by a grenade. I lost connection with the rest of my family. I heard that all of my three brothers were killed. Now I have left only a sister who lives in Bihac, and she doesn't know anything about my brothers.

"On July 11, 1994, I was caught by the enemy army. Right away I was beaten. Then they moved me to another village. They beat me for an hour. They beat me with their hands, their feet, guns, chairs, whatever. After a while, I fell into a coma. I don't know how long it took before I woke up.

"In the concentration camp I was beaten a couple of times. After the beatings I lay for ten days without any food or any help. My teeth were broken, and the bruises gave me a black color. After the beatings, they didn't give me anything to eat for 28 days.

"At the end of July, the Red Cross came and registered all of the prisoners. I told them everything about how the enemy treated us, but as soon as the Red Cross left, I was beaten again. At the end of August, I escaped from that camp. In May 1995, I was shot in the left hand.

"I can't sleep at night. I'm still dreaming about the war, everything that has happened, and about the people who were killed in front of me. In my dreams there is still somebody who wants to kill me. I have become a quiet type of man, and I long for the city where I was born and the people there. I want my wife and my son to be with me again. I want to be able to make normal conditions for my family to live in."

Central Christian Church in Washington, Indiana, shared the following:

Maid, his wife and daughter fled Modrica. Modrica had three ethnic groups: Serbs, Muslims, and Croats. Maid was a Muslim and his wife was a Serb. Because he fell in love with a woman who was not a Muslim, he was discriminated against and neither one could find a job. With money his parents provided, Maid paid the right people and was able to secure papers which allowed them to escape to Germany for a while.

### **The Suffering Continues:**

At the end of 2007 there were still 6,300 Croatian refugees in Bosnia, 2,200 Bosnian refugees in Croatia, 70,000 Croatian refugees in Serbia, and 27,300 Bosnian refugees in Serbia. Even those that have been able to return to their homes have faced up-hill struggles to begin to make life normal again. Sometimes they found their homes totally destroyed and they had to start all over one more time. Sometimes they found others living in their home and there were fights over who the property belonged to – especially if the current residents had invested a lot of money in fixing up a property that had been destroyed by the war.

Even those refugees that were resettled into the United States have struggled to learn how to live in a new culture and speak a new language. Many have done well and become U.S. citizens, but others still struggle with the ghosts of the war keeping them from making a full adjustment. For the latter, it will be their children who will most benefit from the opportunity their family had by coming to the United States.

## Service

*The official Disciples Women's service project for this year is the Build a Village Program in Canton 10 where one of the main priorities is rebuilding the health clinic there. To learn more about this project and how your group can help, see the Disciples Women's Web site at [www.discipleswomen.org](http://www.discipleswomen.org).*

**In addition, RIM offers the following ways for Disciples Women's groups to provide for the needs of Bosnian and Croatian Refugees.**

### **The service of prayer:**

Prayers are especially needed for those Croatian refugees still living in Bosnia and Serbia and those Bosnian refugees still living in Croatia and Serbia. Pray that they might find a solution to their unstable lives that will provide them the opportunity to start their lives over in safe and secure situations.

Several years after their resettlement, most Bosnian and Croatian refugees are doing well in the United States and Canada. However, many of them are still struggling with the cultural adjustments to life in a new culture. Pray that they might find friends who can help them more easily adjust to their new lives.

### **The service of celebration:**

Partner with Bosnians or Croats in your community to celebrate their successful resettlement in the United States by hosting a dinner or party. Invite them to teach you about their cultural celebrations and together plan the dinner. Locate Bosnians and/or Croats in your community by contacting:

- Your local Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program affiliate (see the list at <http://www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration/affiliates.html>);



- English-as-a-Second-Language classes;
- A local college/university; or
- A multicultural center or festival in your community.

### The service of giving:

Week of Compassion continues to respond to the needs of the former Yugoslavia as people try to rebuild their lives following the war. Week of Compassion tries to respond to the most vulnerable – persons who have returned from their refugee status (returnees) and are now trying to rebuild their lives, persons who lost the most in the war, and especially the most vulnerable in society – women and children. The following are two examples Week of Compassion’s response to the needs:

- In 2007, Week of Compassion provided a grant to Church World Service to enable their “Build a Village” program in Bosnia. The Build a Village program was designed to improve lives in targeted rural communities through a sustainable, holistic, and participatory approach, where the village decided for itself what it most needed. The villagers chose veterinary service, a milk collection cooperative, primary health care, and a community entrepreneur fund to help with the purchase of animals and equipment. Over 80 percent of the returnees in that area are farmers whose homes were destroyed, along with their barns, livestock and farming equipment.



The milk collection cooperative  
(Photo: T. Dwyer/CWS)



Roma children  
(Photo: T. Dwyer/CWS)

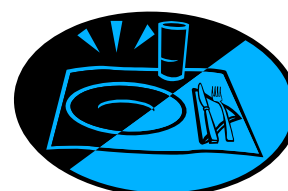
- In the summer of 2008, Week of Compassion provided a grant to Church World Service to enable their office in Serbia to provide a camp for vulnerable Roma (gypsy) children (ages seven to twelve), most of whom had been displaced out of Kosovo. Fifty-five Roma children were able to attend camp. It was hoped that this camp would provide motivation for the Roma children to stay in school and feel more comfortable in a multicultural and multiethnic environment. These children face poverty and prejudice on a daily basis, and most of them do not stay in school because they go to work to help support their families.

Your Disciples Women’s group can play an important part in helping Week of Compassion respond to the continuing needs of persons who were displaced by the war. Make a contribution to Week of Compassion designated either for the specific Build a Village Program in Canton 10 or for all programs in the former Yugoslavia. Send your check to Week of Compassion, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

## Worship

### Worship center:

*Ideas of things to place on your worship center include: a Bible opened to Luke 14:7-24, a globe of the world (with Europe facing those gathered), a dinner place setting, a candle, and your offering basket.*



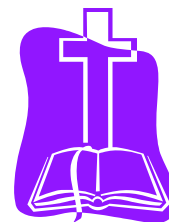
**Call to worship:**

We gather today, standing with those who have been torn from their homes and communities by ethnic cleansing and other forms of violence. We gather to pray that the people of the former Yugoslavia may receive the promises offered by the prophet Isaiah, building houses and inhabiting them, planting vineyards and eating their fruit. May they not build and another inhabit. May they not plant and another eat. May they long enjoy the work of their hands. We gather today, celebrating with those who have begun to build new lives among us. We gather to pray that the people of the former Yugoslavia who now live in the United States and Canada may truly feel one with those of us who have lived here their whole lives. May they grow in their understanding of the English language. May they find the kind of employment that brings worth to their lives. May they find a supportive community in which to prosper.

**Scripture reading:** Luke 14:16-24

**Reflection on scripture:** *Some or all of the following thoughts could be shared as a reflection on the scripture reading.*

When we invite people to a dinner party, we usually invite people we know, who share the same interests as we do. In the story of the great dinner, Jesus challenges us about whom we include in our fellowship and whom we exclude from it. He is even more radical in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-48) where he tells us to love our enemies. The story of the great dinner shows how the kingdom of God transcends our limits. There is no limit to who can be invited – even the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame can become the most welcome of guests. Think about what it is that stops you from inviting those who are different into your parties. Think about what prevented the different ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia from being a welcome part of the country and how those exclusionary feelings led to war. Think about how God affirms the human dignity of even the marginalized and how you can participate in this affirmation of human dignity of strangers. Reflect on how this story of the great dinner would be rewritten if those who are enemies were invited in at the beginning of the dinner. Think about how the diversity of the United States and Canada can be a witness to those who come from countries where diversity is the cause of conflict.

**Prayer:**

Lord God, as you called your Son back home from his early childhood exile in Egypt, you have also called people back to Bosnia and Croatia. As you sheltered Mary and Joseph in the stable, you have also sheltered many Bosnians and Croatians in new homes in the United States and Canada. Grant peace to those who returned home. Grant courage to those that must start their lives over. And grant hope to those who continue to wait without a home. Help all those who live in the midst of conflict to gain a vision of a world made whole where all your people can gather in any land and feel welcome, accepted, and appreciated. Help us to take small steps to become those agents of change that work with you to invite all people to the table of plenty that is spread out for the great dinner. Lead us as we strive to build a community rooted in hospitality and justice in Christ's name. Amen.

**Offering:** *As the offering is received, invite the women to visualize themselves hosting a party that includes those that they usually have no relationship with. Invite them to offer up to God their feelings about such an imaginary scene, knowing that those are the kinds of parties that God is calling all of us to become more a part of.*

**Offering Prayer:**

As we give our offerings this day, O God, help us prepare our hearts to be women who seek always to welcome all persons to the tables of this life. Empower our offerings to feed those who are hungry for food, for meaning in their lives, for healing, for acceptance and love. Help us overcome our tendencies to always gravitate to those who are most like us. Help us overcome the tendencies we have within us to be like those of Bosnia and Croatia who let their ethnic pride overcome their ability to care for others. Inspire us to become hospitable to those most unlike us, so that we can discover your presence in new ways. This we pray in the name of the one who showed us how to welcome all to the table, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

# How to Contact RIM

Please feel free to contact us for any further information you may need, or look us up on the Internet at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/RIM/>. You will find a lot of material about various refugee and immigration issues on our Web site.

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