



DISCIPLES HOME MISSIONS STATEMENT
TO THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, FOR THE HEARING ON:
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program
Thursday, October 1, 2015

As a North American Christian faith movement of over 600,000 which was birthed on the American frontier, our congregations have long cherished the principle of freedom of religion for communities of all backgrounds. We are grateful to be part of a faith tradition that has spoken again and again of our key faith value of welcoming the stranger despite religious or cultural background. Since the time of WWII, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada has worked through our Disciples Home Missions office of Refugee and Immigration Ministries, and in partnership with 33 Church World Service refugee affiliate offices, to resettle over 40,000 refugees in the past six decades.

Now, in these days when our world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II, we reaffirm strongly our readiness to continue to embrace refugees, and to welcome them without exclusion. We are ready to do so because we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Indeed, in light of the reality of over 60 million displaced persons and 20 million refugees in the world, we urge congress to support a greatly increased number of refugee arrivals in the coming years. We are aware that Secretary of State Kerry has requested the U.S. to resettle 85,000 overall refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017. Instead, we strive for a greater goal of hospitality—one which our history has shown is attainable through strong community and government partnerships. We believe that, just as the U.S. admitted over 650,000 European refugees during WWII, and between 100,000-200,000 Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade and a half after the Vietnam War, the U.S. should now admit 100,000 Syrians and an additional 100,000 refugees of other backgrounds into our nation beginning in 2016.

In our international partnerships in mission, we have consistently observed families struggling desperately to stay together, and even to remain alive, because of the spiral of violence in their homelands. We see many Christians persecuted. But we likewise see persecution of Muslims, of Jews, and of families of other faiths. All populations have desperate needs, and are worthy of our resettlement and welcome. As we support relationships of peace and solidarity across religious divides internationally, we are absolutely opposed to any legislation here in the U.S. that would prioritize Christian refugees at the expense or rejection of Muslim refugees and individuals of other faiths. Instead, we must lead the world with our great capacity for hospitality.

Welcoming refugees who are our world's most vulnerable people to this land of the free should never require a religious litmus test to step onto our shores. Rather, we must counter anti-Muslim sentiment at every turn—allowing us to offer protection to Syrian refugees. By so doing, we will welcome opportunities for relationship with hard working doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, coaches, pastors, imams. And we can know that each one to whom we offer our hands--after years of suffering--is grateful for life, and ready to pour potential into our communities, to be ambassadors of the American Dream, and to help us live out our principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

America today is being called to fish from a different side of the boat – the side of abundant generosity and welcome – for the sake all our sisters and brothers fleeing persecution and loss of life in Syria. Let us cast our nets over to this other side and be blessed as a world leader whose compassion reaches from the halls of government out to the streets where fleeing refugees are crying for help. There is a moral challenge directly before us. Our congregations are calling us constantly, expressing their willingness to help house, teach English, mentor, employ, and surround the world's most vulnerable people. Members of Congress, we urge you to do all you can to open these doors of opportunities for the world's most vulnerable persons. What are we waiting for?