



**FAITH LEADER PRESS CONFERENCE  
IN SUPPORT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES**  
**Rev. Ron Degges, President Disciples Home Missions:**  
*Faith calls us to welcome refugees of all religious backgrounds*



*SEPTEMBER 28, 2015, WASHINGTON, D.C.*

I am grateful to be a part of a faith tradition that has spoken again and again—over the years through denominational resolutions, in recent months in a letter to the President, and just weeks ago as a national interfaith team of religious leaders--of **our key faith value of welcoming the stranger despite religious or cultural background. We must welcome without exclusion, because we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves.**

As we are committed to our core to not mistreat in our minds OR our practice any who are different from us, **I was deeply disturbed last week, to learn of legislation just introduced in the House of Representatives that would inject religious discrimination into our nation's refugee resettlement program.** I was disturbed, in part, because of faces of persecution I just saw earlier this year, when travelling with faith leaders in the Middle East. I saw families struggling desperately to stay together, and to stay ALIVE, because of the spiral of violence in their homelands during what the United Nations has called "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time." **We saw persecution of Christians. But we likewise saw persecution of Muslims, of Jews, and of families of other faiths.** ALL have desperate needs.

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.** As the U.S. joins the world to respond to the crisis in Syria and throughout the region, such discriminatory legislation is a dishonorable and unfaithful use of our opportunity to lead.

Syrian Christians have and should continue to be resettled in the United States. But **they are no more "deserving" of life, safety, and resettlement than our brothers and sisters who practice Islam and other faiths**—and we are morally obligated as people of faith, and as a nation, to welcome them without any question as to their religious affiliation.

**Welcoming refugees who are our world's most vulnerable 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. What are we waiting for?**

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