


Neighbour

A woman with a distressed expression is holding a young child. She is wearing a black t-shirt with a yellow Nike logo and the word 'ESTRONG' in yellow. The background shows a chaotic outdoor setting with people, some in military-style uniforms, and debris on the ground. The overall tone is somber and urgent.

**“Love your
neighbour
as yourself”**

Leviticus 19.18
& Luke 10.27

The fifth in a series of six booklets

CONNECT!
contemporary crises and everyday faith

'Who is my neighbour?'

Jesus is in conversation with a lawyer about the very heart of the Jewish law, the twin demand to love both God and neighbour. But, wanting to define his terms, the lawyer asks the question on which all the material in this booklet is hinged: "And who is my neighbour?"

Perhaps if he's honest, his question is actually, "Who is *not* my neighbour? Who is *not* my responsibility? Whom do I *not* have to love?" It would make it so much easier if one could justify at least a few exemptions...

In answer, Jesus tells the parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37). Hard for such a familiar story to scandalise as intended!

A Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews, becomes the story's hero. The feared, unwelcome one both recognised a neighbour in the half-dead man and also proved to be neighbour to him.

Artists like Jacopo Bassano take Jesus' story beyond first century Palestine. He sets the parable in 16th century Italy, his hometown in the distance (right). As Mark Oakley says, "It is a story which interrupts your landscape and lodges itself alarmingly close to your life".



Can you identify occasions when this story has come close to *your* life?



Cover image: A mother fleeing violence in Central America runs out of options at the border into Mexico.

Armed guards in heavy protective gear are flanked behind her, blocking the route she had desperately hoped to take.

As always, Jesus in *The Good Samaritan* is working hard to get us to expand our imagination of God's grace and to re-evaluate our boundaries accordingly...

Another thing to notice is the emphasis given by Jesus to the tiny word 'do': "You have given the right answer. *Do this and you will live.*" (10.28); "Go and *do likewise.*" (10.37). As Barbara Brown Taylor says, his story shows that "it matters not what we think, understand, know, feel or say about love, but what we *do* about love which brings us life." There's no mistaking the *doing* in Bassano's painting – we feel the back-breaking effort here as one neighbour prepares to heave the other neighbour onto the waiting mule.

And is the fact that the two men are each neighbour to the other in the giving and receiving of care underlined by deliberate similarity in the two faces?

"May I miss neither my neighbour's need nor my enemy's gift" from a prayer by Ted Loder

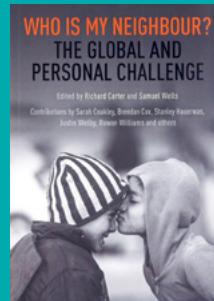
The neighbour next door

The Samaritan teaches us that our neighbour is whoever needs us, similar or different, near or far. In the context of the biggest displacement of human beings ever recorded, this booklet will focus on the global refugee crisis but not until we have heard from Mother, now Saint, Teresa of Calcutta...



When she came to the UK in the 1970's, she was shocked by this nation's poverty of spirit, individual households existing in silos without ever really connecting with those living nearby. "I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbour. Do you know your next door neighbour?" she famously asked.

One silver lining in the Covid cloud has been that many are more connected to their close neighbours than before. The Thursday clap made formerly unseen neighbours visible to each other; awareness of lockdown need encouraged neighbours to put notes through letterboxes and knock on each other's doors. How can we sustain this new connectivity?



Commit to reading one essay a week from this rich and challenging collection and discuss with others?



Listen to Br Lawrence Yuen reflecting on the lawyer's question in the context of social isolation and pandemic: <https://youtu.be/20Toipfv5n4>
Do any of his ideas particularly resonate?



Cox's Bazaar

Social distancing simply isn't possible for the 1 million Rohingya refugees living at Cox's Bazaar in south-eastern Bangladesh. The name suggests something charming, even exotic, but the reality is emphatically not. It is the world's largest refugee settlement. Families live in close quarters inside flimsy bamboo shacks, using communal taps and toilets. Basic items like soap are often unavailable. Daily life is unimaginably hard.

Most of the refugees fled here in 2017, following a brutal crackdown by the Myanmar military. Nurul Amin, 35, was one of them: "I lost my father, my brother, my sister and one of my nephews. Everything I owned was burned down," he says. The journey to Bangladesh took him twelve terrified days and nights over mountains and through forests.

On top of psychological trauma, many refugees have underlying health conditions that now leave them especially vulnerable to Covid-19. Despite desperate attempts by the UN and other agencies to increase facilities, it's feared medical centres could quickly be overwhelmed. In the photo above, Amin watches as a new influx of refugees reaches the camp.

In our day it is the Rohingya people alongside citizens of Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan and many more places besides. But as the sculptor Timothy P. Schmalz points out, "We've all come from somewhere". Again and again in the pages of the Hebrew Bible, God also points this out and cites it as a reason for compassionate action towards others who are forced to relocate. See for example, Deut 10.19: "*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*"

Lord Jesus, you came among us homeless, and as a refugee.
Shake our complacency, rekindle our compassion
and help us challenge our leaders to forge a common strategy
which is truly just and fair for all.

USPG

Poets James Byrne and Shehzar Doja travelled to Cox's Bazaar in 2018:

"Our aim was to set up a creative writing workshop," says Byrne. "Every person there has a story to tell or knows someone, often from their own family, who has been killed, raped, imprisoned or tortured. We wanted to put together a poetic response from those who'd survived."

The anthology "I am a Rohingya" (right) is a result and features the poem below.



"I Am a Rohingya" implores the world to listen to the spirit of a people who have experienced some of the worst human rights abuses on the planet. These poems, from a crisis that must be addressed, have no alternative but to speak out.

John Kinsella (Australian poet)

Someone I'm Afraid Of

I'm a hungry star in the sky,
covered by jealous clouds.

I'm a goldfish plant in the garden,
shaded from daylight.

I'm a fly in the kitchen,
buzzing on the boundary of a blind wall.

I'm a chicken under mother's wing,
confined to the narrows of a wattle.

I'm a dove on the street of Yangon,
jailed in the cage of inhumanity.

I'm the water flowing in Mayu river,
missing my partner — Air.

I'm a human in the universe,
denied the most basic rights.

I'm someone I'm afraid of.

Zaki Ovais



The poem above underlines the confinement of a refugee, invisible to the outside world. Every couplet speaks of a life frustrated, diminished, forgotten. Which do you find most powerful?

This graphic is an effort to alert people to speak



out. The pink triangle is a reminder of the badge worn by homosexual prisoners in Nazi prison camps. Many of them, like Jewish, gypsy, and other political and religious prisoners, were murdered because of the silence of indifference to the atrocity. The graphic demands speech and action on behalf of anyone who is forgotten...

'I exist because you exist'

A few years after the end of World War 11, Coventry Cathedral – then a bombed-out ruin – began a ministry of reconciliation both local and global. The Revd Dr Sarah Hills, its current Canon for Reconciliation, here explains how the Cathedral's past experience informs the way it responds to the present:

"Our shared stories of reconciliation from the past provide us with the means to engage with current situations such as the refugee crisis. Refugees are fleeing from conflict and war, from fear and persecution. They are not 'the other': they are people like us.

"At the back of the nave we have installed a small sailing boat, like some of those recently seen on our screens, overflowing with frightened men, women and children. This boat symbolises the plight of those who risk everything to reach safety...

"In our broken world, reconciliation cannot be left to a few. There is a Southern African word, 'Ubuntu', which translates as 'I exist because you exist'. In other words, we are all connected, and we are all God's children, and reconciliation is a journey that we make together."



"No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land."

Warsan Shire (British writer)

A poem of two voices

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our communities
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

'Refugees' a poem by Brian Bilston. Image of Syrian refugees who are told "Europe is closed" as tensions rise at the Greece/Turkey border

When we first read the poem, we hear a familiar rhetoric of fear and suspicion. But the poet adds a small request at the bottom of his poem - that we angle ourselves anew and **read it again, not from the top down but from the bottom up**. From this different position, everything looks radically different... This poem also comes as a beautifully illustrated book (right).



In Leviticus 19.18, God instructs the ancient Jews to 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. And then, some verses later, to preclude too small an interpretation of 'neighbour', the same formula is used of the 'alien' or foreigner'. The care of those who come from further afield is not an optional extra. They too are 'neighbour' and must be loved 'as yourself':

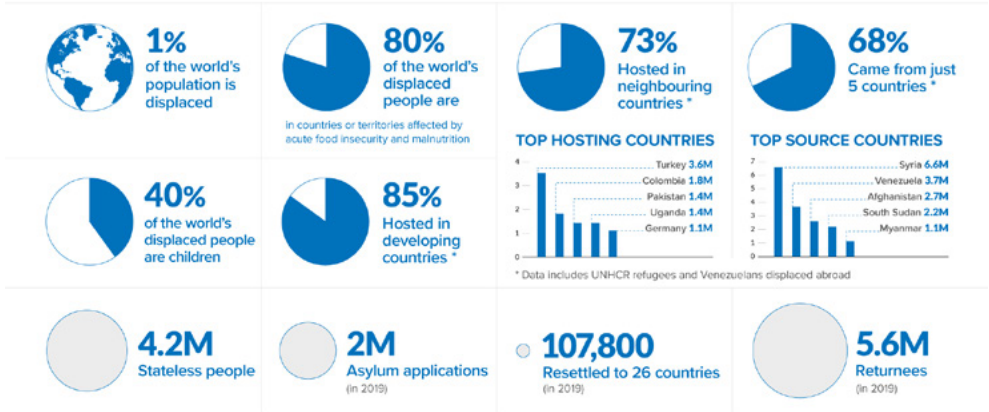
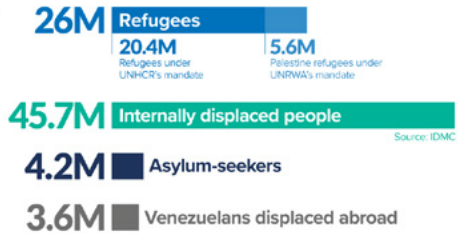
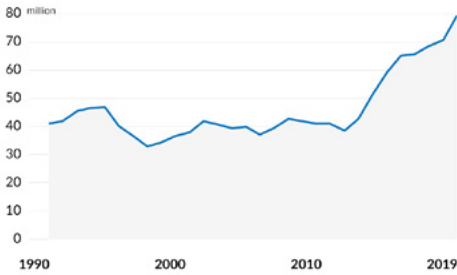
"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19.33-4

The scale of displacement

We are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record... By the end of 2019, 79.5 million individuals worldwide (almost equivalent to the entire population of Germany) had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, human rights violations or hunger. New displacement remains very high. One person becomes displaced every 3 seconds – less than the time it takes to read this sentence. That's 20 people who are newly displaced every minute.

79.5 MILLION forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019

Source: UNHCR / 18 June 2020



employs **17,324** personnel in **135** countries (as of 31 May 2020)

We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86 per cent from governments and the European Union and 10 per cent from private donors



'Asylum seeker'? 'Refugee'? 'Migrant'? Watch this helpful explanation of the differences and why the language matters: <https://youtu.be/EOHMBKPg1hU>

Have a good look at the infographic above. Does anything surprise you or stand out in any other way?

'My neighbour, God's gift'

The words above title a piece by Sam Wells which resolutely challenges our society's tendency to see the neighbour from afar as potentially submerging us in an ocean of need. That tendency seems extraordinary in the face of the initiative, dogged determination, and physical and mental resilience needed to flee one's own homeland and make it to another country relatively intact. As the Tennessee Office for Refugees puts it:

"To be called a refugee is the opposite of an insult; it is a badge of strength, courage, and victory."

Voices from many different quarters make similar points. Here are a few of them:

SOME FAMOUS REFUGEES THROUGHOUT HISTORY



Jesus



Albert Einstein
Scientist



Marc Chagall
Famous painter



Bob Marley
Musician and singer



Anne Frank
Author of a famous diary



Luol Deng
NBA All-Star
basketball player



Victor Hugo
Famous French author



Freddy Mercury
Rock star



Jman
Supermodel

Many more refugees have made the world a better place. Look them up!

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"How we relate to refugees is a major challenge for us all, particularly when the voices of those who regard them as a security threat, economic problem or social burden drown out stories of the rich contribution many refugees make to our common life." Bishop Graham Usher, *The Way Under our Feet*

"Not only are refugees not a burden, they are in fact welfare-enhancing assets. Indeed, accepting, protecting, and empowering refugees is a win-win-win formula: for the refugees themselves, for the country of destination, and for the country of origin." Dany Bahar, Global Economy & Development Programme

(You can read Dr Bahar's article in full here: www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/06/19/refugees-are-a-win-win-win-formula-for-economic-development)



"Refugees are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, with the same hopes and ambitions as us - except that a twist of fate has bound their lives to a global refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale." Khaled Hosseini, Afghan-American novelist

Exile

In his book, *The Way under our Feet*, Bishop Graham Usher emphasises that those who have left homelands, undergone dangerous journeys and taken up residence in a foreign land, “miss that deep sense of place that shapes who we are. They fear not only where they have come from but also the unknown and otherness of where they seek to go.”

We can see these feelings in the faces of Aeneas and his old father (right) fleeing from the burning ruins of ancient Troy, as sculpted by Ana Maria Pacheco in her huge 2008 piece *Shadows of the Wanderer*, as well as in the desperate contemporary figures fleeing war-torn Syria above. The face of exile is timeless.

We can hear these feelings in the words of Psalm 137 (written during enforced exile in Babylon during the 6th century BC), as well as in the short contemporary poem below. The voice of exile is timeless too.



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Listen to two very different musical versions of Psalm 137: Boney M recorded this one in 1978 (<https://youtu.be/zdgMo7BjA0Y>) and Ben Vonberg-Clark, singing all the parts himself, recorded this one during the lockdown of 2020 as part of his Virtual Psalmathon (<https://youtu.be/KRQXj4PKQUk>).

*I turn from longing to the tasks life gives,
beneath all surfaces your river flows –
I call you Grief. I shun you and I hear
your murmur as I give myself to sleep.*

‘Exile’
by Dick Davis

A young Syrian speaks...

“We lost friends and family in the savage civil war and had to leave Syria. That was two years ago. We now depend on aid and are living in a grim, Greek refugee camp. Our country is torn apart, millions of us are displaced in poverty and nightmares disturb us every night. But we are determined. We hold onto any opportunity to learn and develop ourselves. I am determined to provide the world with love and peace, which the world itself could not provide.”

Angels unawares

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13.2

I remember that day
so very well,
the day I entertained an angel
unawares.

Late one night,
a knock at the door –
the homeless, raggedy man
who stood there.

A private sigh,
a forced, public smile,
the door held wide
and a ‘do come in’.

The teacup gratefully cradled,
the food sandwiching the words:

‘Yes, I’ve come a long way.’

The voice so soft yet strong,
the gaze so piercing yet pure.

Then he stood so tall,
lightly touched my arm –
and how his touch did burn! –

‘Thank you!’

spoken so tenderly,
the blessing caressing
and encircling my soul.

‘Who are you?’ I whispered
as he disappeared from view.

But in reality I knew –
as I have since always known for sure –
that day, that night,

I had entertained an angel
unawares.

Susan Hardwick

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Just as you did so to one of the least of these... you did so to me”

Matthew 25. 35,40



In the autumn of 2019, as the bells rang out in St Peter’s Square, Rome, the sculpture above by Timothy P. Schmalz was unveiled. It depicts 140 figures from various times and places huddled together on a boat and includes indigenous people, Mary and Joseph, Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and a Syrian child. Wings emerging from the centre of the group reveal that something holy is here. The sculpture is called *Angels Unaware...*

At the unveiling, Pope Francis called for a fourfold response to the global refugee crisis: welcome, protection, promotion and integration.

Welcoming the stranger

“Don’t talk to strangers!” “Stranger danger!” We grow up with such mantras instilled deeply into us. And as much as we understand the fear which lies behind them, they can make us more prone to build walls than bridges with those who are unknown/different. And then the cost to our humanity is high.

Abraham modelled a going above-and-beyond kind of hospitality, when he welcomed strangers into the shade of a tree, washed their feet, and offered them the finest of foods (Genesis 18:1-8). Lydia, too, modelled this radical hospitality when she housed Paul and Silas (Acts 16:11-15, 40). And look what happened when Cleopas and his companion welcomed a stranger into their Emmaus home at the end of the first Easter Day! (Luke 24. 13-35)



Can you identify other biblical examples of hospitality?



Listen to Aimilia, a grandmother from Lesbos, Greece.

<https://youtu.be/HZNf6ywFPXA>



She and her friends became the embodiment of solidarity when a picture of them feeding a Syrian baby went viral in 2015. Her village has welcomed strangers arriving by boat for many years. She says that even when they had nothing else to give, they gave love and courage.



Look at the hymn below, lingering over each phrase, each line. Does anything particularly touch/inspire/challenge you?

1. Here to the house of God we come,
home of the people of the Way,
here to give thanks for all we have,
naming our needs for every day,
we who have roof and rent and bread,
sure of a place to rest our head.

2. There is a knocking at our door,
sound of the homeless of the world,
voice of the frightened refugee,
cry of the children in the cold,
asking the least that is their right,
safety and shelter for the night.

3. God who is shelter, who is home,
in borrowed rooms you came to live,
pleaded to save the dispossessed,
crucified, lay in borrowed grave:
these are no strangers in your eyes,
this is your family which cries.

4. We are all tenants of your love;
gather us round a common fire,
warm us in company with Christ,
give us the heart to feel, to share
table and lodging with free hand,
space in our living, in our land.

Radical hospitality

In the summer of 2020, Gary Lineker made headlines by signing up with *Refugees at Home*, the UK charity which connects those with a spare room and refugees/asylum-seekers in need of one. "My kids are grown up so there's plenty of room," he said. "If I can help, then I'm more than happy to do so. Why not?"

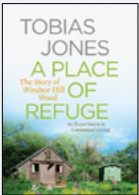


See also this amusing little video which he's made with Jo Brand:
twitter.com/i/status/1301431034995789824

'Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ' Rule of St Benedict 53:1

Benedict's vision of radical hospitality draws on Matthew 25. 31-46 and, with these words which follow, lies at the heart of all Benedictine communities past and present: "Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims because in them more particularly, Christ is received."

In his book *A Place of Refuge*, Tobias Jones describes how he and his young family lived out these words, selling their home and setting up a woodland refuge in Dorset for people in crisis – addiction or homelessness, for example.



"Hospitality", he says, "has always been a sacred act, a cultural obligation through which people inadvertently glimpse the holy. And perhaps that's especially the case", he goes on, "when the person being welcomed isn't an old friend but actually a stranger or even an enemy (both "guest" and "hostile" have the same etymological root)." You might like to read his book...



Watch this video and wrestle with the question it poses... 'What does it look like for ordinary churches to live out radical hospitality?'
https://youtu.be/GCy_tukuk30

*Lord God of wilderness,
wave and wind,
you travel with the
wanderers of the world.
Stay close, we pray to all
who live with loss,
in terror and adrift,
and spur us on
to build a world
where there is truly room
for all. Amen*

USPG

*"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-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp
beside the golden door!"*

Words by Emma Lazarus inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. Her poem also names the statue "Mother of Exiles".



Two local responses

The Mothers' Union and Norfolk County Council

As soon as Norfolk County Council embarked on its refugee resettlement scheme, Mothers' Union members across the Diocese of Norwich were keen to offer practical support. "Once the families in camps on Syria's borders are identified," explains Jenny Holcombe, Project Development Leader, "we buy their bedding and bed linen with donations from MU branches across the diocese. And then, just before the families arrive, we help with cleaning if necessary and make up all their beds, popping in a teddy for the children." Over the first three years of the scheme, approximately 50 families have been given cosy homes. They are now happily settled, the children doing well at school.

MU involvement in the project has been made possible through the open and innovative approach of a social work team based in the Forum's Millennium Library. Called *The People from Abroad Team*, it was set up to respond to the needs of Syrians and others seeking refuge and is led by Simon Shreeve. When awarded a top prize at the Social Worker of the Year Awards in 2018, Simon said, "It's an amazing achievement for us to win this award. We are a tiny team covering a very large county, working with lots of people in the community to make a positive difference. The award is a tribute to everyone's efforts, not just our team."

If you would like to support the County Council's work with refugees, please go to www.help-refugees-uk.service.gov.uk to see what items and skills are currently needed. In addition, the MU Administrator (01603 882330) will gladly explain how gifts of money towards further bedding purchases may be made.



Top: MU members Jenny and Ruth make up beds for a family soon to arrive. Bottom: MU members outside the Forum in Norwich pressing for a local response. Photo: Keith Morris networknorfolk.co.uk





Lambeth Palace made headlines in 2016 when a cottage in its grounds was offered to the first Syrian family coming to Britain under the Community Refugee Sponsorship Scheme. "Refugees", said Archbishop Justin, "like all people, are treasured human beings, made in the image of God, who deserve safety, freedom, and the opportunity to flourish."

Norwich Cathedral and Hope into Action

"The church is central to our Hope into Action model. We believe the church can bring something unique and brilliant (acceptance, love, prayer and community) to the lives of the homeless."



"It all started from a feeling of being totally overwhelmed and helpless in the face of the refugee crisis," explains Wendy Bryant, the volunteer co-ordinator for Norwich Cathedral's partnership with Hope into Action (HiA).

"At last here was a way of making a difference."

In 2018, HiA provided a house and Cathedral volunteers got to work making it ready for a Muslim family with three little boys. Donations of furniture, furnishings and kitchen equipment, for example, kept costs to a minimum. While the practical team was at work, other volunteers supported through prayer (welcomed by the family) or trained to become members of the friendship and support group.

HiA's policy is to offer housing for just two years so, from the outset, it is the support group's task to help ready those they welcome for greater independence. The Cathedral's volunteers have done this by gently helping the family to integrate into British life. "We've been able to support the mother with her English," says Wendy, "and have tried to spot other ways in which the family might be helped to feel more at ease in a strange culture. They hadn't realised, for example, that parents here are allowed, even encouraged, to go into schools and talk to teachers about their children's progress. The beauty of HiA is that it's about building up relationships of ordinary neighbourliness."

To find out more about involvement with HiA go to:
norwich.hopeintoaction.org.uk/get-involved



'What then should we do?' (Luke 3.10)

Here are three suggestions: choose your depth and dive in!

Find a way of reaching out to someone in your own neighbourhood with whom you've had little or no contact.

Join a movement of people who welcome refugees by signing up at www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/i-welcome/

Mobilise your church (norwich.hopeintoaction.org.uk/partner) to partner *Hope into Action* in providing a home for vulnerable 'neighbours' from near or far.

Image: Bokica/Shutterstock.com

Useful Norfolk websites:

- newroutes.org.uk
- englishplus.org.uk
- norwich.cityofsanctuary.org
- norwich.hopeintoaction.org.uk
- norwichintegrationpartnership.org.uk
- gyros.org.uk (Great Yarmouth)
- accessmigrantsupport.org.uk
- communityactionnorfolk.org.uk
- niyp.org.uk

National/international websites:

- unhcr.org/uk
- refugeesathome.org
- sponsorrefugees.org
- resetuk.org
- refugeecouncil.org.uk
- refsource.gebnet.co.uk
- habitatforhumanity.org.uk
- gov.uk/help-refugees
- worldvision.org.uk

About the series...

This is the fifth in a series of six booklets exploring the relationship between Christian faith and some of the most pressing issues of our time. The hope is that individuals and groups of all sorts will find them challenging and inspiring.

Written by Susanna Gunner