



Bishop's view: Step up for refugees fleeing violence, threatened by death

By [Thomas M. Aitken](#) Today at 3:13 p.m.

People of faith always have been called by God to welcome the stranger and to build bridges rather than walls with others, especially those who flee violence, rape, the threat of death, separation of families and impossible living conditions. In anxious times, there always have been those who use fear and degradation to summon the worst impulses we may have rather than the greatest power, the power of love and understanding.

As a bishop in the Lutheran church, I stand with my church, the Scriptures, and all those who welcome refugees and migrants no matter what their language or faith.

We are facing an unprecedented worldwide crisis with 65 million human beings fleeing from bloodshed, war, rape, the separation of families, and fear of death. From Syria alone, there are 5 million refugees; 51 percent of whom are children.

Many faith traditions — including my own, the Evangelical Lutheran church in America — have welcomed refugees since World War II and even before, attending to the basic needs of others and helping to create the kind of reciprocal love and understanding, decency and kindness our world needs so badly. Stories of how this has helped shaped a better America can be heard by those who were welcomed.

It doesn't help to demonize those who disagree with us — no matter who we voted for in the presidential election. There will always be differences of opinion by well-meaning people, and it helps to ask questions rather than cast judgment on those who voted for someone you or I didn't.

But it's vital for the sake of all to stand up for courageous and loving action. At a breakfast table in the home of one of our congregants recently, a mother texted me about how her family read Scripture and discussed what it means to follow Jesus. They used passages from both the Old and New Testaments, which reminded them that God intends for us to bless others with practical, down-to-earth love, no matter who that person is and without expecting something in return.

I hear stories like this all the time. Millions of people from all political backgrounds and from both non-religious and religious persuasions are stepping up with courage and compassion right now. They are moving from talking to acting on what they know is life-saving for refugees fleeing persecution no matter where those refugees come from. Seeking out the truth, checking the facts, opening our hearts and homes, and speaking the truth in love is what is needed today. The rigorous refugee-screening process should be known and understood in the midst of our conversations. Backbiting, fear-mongering, spreading half-truths, and imagining the worst from those who may differ from our own opinion diminish us and divert us from actually living into the joy of God's love.

In times like we are experiencing today, Christians do what we always were called to do: love our neighbor as ourselves; put the best possible construction on our neighbor; stop the oppression of widows, orphans, aliens and the poor; stand up against injustice; and bear witness to God's incredible love for all people.

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