

**"Where you go I will go; and
where you stay I will stay." RUTH 1:16**

Our Bible is filled with stories of journeys. From the chronicle of how God's spirit moved across creation in search of a caretaker in Genesis, to Jesus' call in the Great Commission – to go and make Disciples in all nations – the People of God have been on the move.

Unfortunately, sometimes that movement reflects the last possible choice for families in crisis. War, disaster, a changing climate or devastated economy have forced millions over the years to seek safety as refugees.

Since 1946, Church World Service, the relief, development and refugee assistance ministry of 37 member communions such as ours, has been called to resettle refugees, allowing them to escape warfare, civil strife, oppression and statelessness. Since the end of World War II, your mission partner, CWS, has offered life-giving resettlement to more than 800,000 persons. At every step of the way, there have been congregations like ours who have stepped forward to serve as co-sponsors, mentors and friends to newly arrived refugees on behalf of the Church.

Today we celebrate that effort and recognize that the world is facing a refugee crisis we have not seen in generations. At this moment, there are more refugees in the world than at any time since World War II. Fighting rages in Syria, with families fleeing for safety. Sectarian violence has forced men, women and children from their homes in the Central African Republic on a scale that has not been seen in decades. Persecution of minority groups like Rohingya endures in Asia.

The threat of violence forces parents to send their children away, unaccompanied, in Central and Latin America because for them, sending their children away, alone or in the care of strangers is an even safer option than staying put. Week of Compassion helps us to be there for them.

The offering we make today is steeped in more than just decades of tradition. It is rooted in responding to Christ's call to welcome the stranger. The Week of Compassion offering connects our church's resources to others to provide help beyond just emergency food, water and shelter. Our offering will help people in need begin a new life free from violence, persecution, shifting climate -- a new life with hope for the future.

From the journey of his Disciples in following Jesus in his ministry to John's writing of the Book of Revelation, in exile, on the Isle of Patmos, the people of God have been on the move. We have the chance today to answer God's call. Let us respond generously to help as one Church. As we offer our gifts, let us be mindful not only of the assistance for those forced to flee their homes. May we also recognize that in giving, we, too are moved in our journey to live ever more in Christ's image.