



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

Our faith calls us to respond to people in crisis. Sometimes crises occur from forces of nature and sometimes they are the result of violent acts of persecution: what we – human beings - do to each other. The gospel has much to say about this. It empowers us to respond in our own time, as we reflect upon the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The current conflict in Syria is the world's single largest refugee crisis in nearly a quarter of a century. The four-year conflict has forced more than 9 million people from their homes. That's more than 40 percent of the country's pre-war population. Over 4 million Syrian refugees who have fled to neighboring countries, and an additional 7 million remain displaced inside Syria – in cities, towns and rural areas.

Life for Syrians in exile is increasingly difficult. Most live below the poverty line and in sub-standard shelters. Hope of returning home diminishes each year the civil war continues. As the rate of poverty increases among refugees, practices such as child labor and child marriage are on the rise amongst families in the deepest crisis. In the already vulnerable surrounding countries, communities are straining to sustain support for refugees as competition for employment, land, housing, water and energy grows.

We can respond to the crisis in Syria and to other tragedies across the globe. Donations to Week of Compassion not only sustain a response to issues of global refugee displacement and war, they go to support our efforts to welcome refugees as they arrive in the U.S. and adjust to a new life.

Matthew 25 states: "Come, you that are blessed. . .inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . ."

This passage marks some of Jesus' final words to his disciples before ascending to heaven. The text is more than a call to help - it is a final judgment on whether Christ's people have acted with compassion towards those in need. Here we learn that the 'good news' comes first to the ones in crisis. Christ comes to us as the "least" – the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner.

Week of Compassion provides an opportunity to act together. In Syria. In Africa. In Asia, and Latin America - wherever there are needs for care, to live out Christ's call.

As we heed the call of our faith - across denominations, working together in unity, as one ecumenical body – we are invited to make more of an impact than any one of us could alone. Together we can make a difference. Not only can we address the immediate needs of those displaced by war and persecution, we can also address the long-term issues of poverty and social injustice. This is the gospel mandate, and the gospel hope.