

“Those Who are Weary”:

The Role of the Christian
Church in U.S. Refugee
Resettlement

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There are more than 14 million refugees around the world today.¹ These are people who have been in such danger from their home countries that they have been forced to leave everything they have known behind. Many of these refugees are herded into encampments where everything from food to shelter is dependent on the United Nations (UN) and other aid organizations. To add insult to injury in some countries such as Kenya heavy restrictions are placed on refugees preventing them from working and sometimes even leaving the government allotted areas they've been given.² As a result, many refugees are not given the opportunity to prosper and live lives independent of aid and foreign intervention.

Refugee resettlement gives refugees the opportunity to start anew in a country where they are allowed the freedom to work towards a better life for them and their children. Resettlement was designed for people who have no hope of returning to their country of origin but are also not welcome in their country of asylum. In addition to being economically repressed, some refugees experience situations where their lives are in danger if they are to remain in their country of asylum.

80,800 refugees were able to be resettled in 2005. Of this small amount, 53, 813 were resettled in the United States.³ The US government attempts to give them sufficient aid and support so that they are able to be self sufficient within a few months.

Unfortunately the nature and set up of the of the US Reception and Placement Program (R&P) often times make it difficult for refugees to begin on their own. These difficulties

¹ Lutheran Social Services, FAQ: About Refugee Resettlement- Pre Arrival Accessed April 20, 2008 < <http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/faq/resettlementpre.htm#3> >

² U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World Refugee Survey: Kenya (2007). Accessed April 20, 2008 <<http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2005>>

³United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Refugees by Numbers 2006 Edition, Accessed April 20, 2008 < <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/opendoc.htm?tbl=BASICS&id=3b028097c> >

make it imperative that the newly arrived refugees get additional support from average people who can point them in the right direction.

The Christian church can provide that support. Scripture gives a very clear mandate to the church to be actively engaged in the lives of the poor. Christians are not to stand on the sidelines or to harbor the gifts and knowledge that they have. Instead they are to share what they have with others in need. Whether it is the gift of time, guidance, support or even financial aid, the church not only has the ability but is called to help those such as refugees. Through looking at the example of the church's scriptural mandate to be involved in these activities through the lens of refugee resettlement in America we will see that the church has a large role to play.

In this paper, Christianity is defined as a faith with the belief that Jesus Christ is the only way to God the Father, and who views the Bible as their benchmark by which they view the world, and believe also that the Bible is infallible. If the Bible notates that all scripture is God-Breathed, then we need to view it that way. If we do not hold to this we delve down the slippery slope of holding to some aspects of scripture and not to other, they all need to be viewed in light of the whole of scripture, one unified message. When do messages of Christ become left to interpretation? When do we hold fast to them? If we accept certain teachings of scripture and not others we are simply choosing and following the messages we find important and not what the teacher of these messages found important. And if this paper is calling all of those who follow Christ to be held to this higher standard of caring for the poor we cannot make that call in an atmosphere that sways to and fro on different aspects of scripture. Any call to this higher standard will be

murky at best if readers pick and chose what is important of Christ's teachings and not Christ Himself.

Second, it is important to denote that a Christian believe these things based on the fact of the previous point, it is not enough for a self proclaimed Christ follower to merely adhere to one portion of Scripture and not another. If one is going to make the argument that a Christ follower act in a certain way, it first needs to be backed by scripture, and because it needs to be backed by scripture a Christ follower needs to be ready to adhere to the whole scripture. ■

When this Paper refers to the church, it is referring to all Christians based on this definition. The church does not mean any one denomination nor does it mean a building. In addition, when I describe "the Church" I will be referring to churches which are fundamentally based off of the Bible as their guiding principal. While other texts can be used in conjunction with the Bible, they are used only to better explain biblical concepts. An example would be Bible devotionals. Churches would not use them as their guiding word, but would hopefully use them to better connect with those wishing to delve deeper into biblical truths.

Throughout this paper, the Bible will be defined as the protestant version with 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.⁴ While there are some denominations of Christians who use other books, the paper will concentrate on the books of the Bible that were accepted by the Synod of Carthage which affirmed that the scriptures which were inspired by God.

⁴ Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James 1 and 2 Peter, 1,2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation

Believing that the Bible is 100 percent true does take a certain amount of faith but then again, everything in society today (even science) takes a bit of faith to believe. But one thing the Bible has done over and over again through out history, is that it has proven itself true by outside accounts and corroborating historical finds. While the Bible mandates that the church care for the poor and that mandate is the only correct interpretation of those passages the application of those passages can be endless. It is also important to note that while the Bible says of itself that it only has one correct meaning for each passage it can have many different applications. How one would care for the poor in the United States is vastly different for how one would care for the poor in say Sierra Leone—both of these ways fulfill the mandate of scripture in very different ways(John 16:12-15; I Cor. 2:7-15)

Christians believe that every word of the Bible is true and is inspired by God or the New International Version's (NIV) translation is "God-breathed".⁵ This means, that while the books were written by various men throughout history that God had a hand in every word that was written. Christians believe that God used people such as Luke, Paul and Hosea to write down the words for His people to follow.

With the basis that the Bible is true and that everything in the Bible is inspired and useful for "teaching and rebuking"⁶, the argument can be made that many of the teachings in the Bible have been over looked and ignored. While the Bible was written to teach and build up believers, it was also written so that Christians would have a guideline on how to live their lives. Of the instances overlooked is caring for the poor and the foreign or what could be translated today as refugees.

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁶ The Holy Bible, NIV, 2 Timothy 3:16

The reason that many have overlooked the obvious command in scripture to care for the poor for so long is that they have not viewed all scripture as equal. Many read scripture and apply their own meaning to it, cutting and adding what they would like to fit into their own personal world view, a different practice than trying to interpret scripture through our modern lense. However, this is not how scripture or other historic texts are to be read. For a long time it was not a part of mainstream culture to be passionate about caring for the poor. Scripture however did not change because of it; it has always said the same things. In recent years as caring for the poor has become so mainstream the masses have begun to notice that scripture has talked about it for a long time. This is why it is so important to read scripture and historic texts thoroughly and not just glean from them the meanings and applications we like for that day.

At the turn of the last century the mainline church of the western world split into two predominant schools of thought. Neither of these schools of thought accurately followed the whole of scripture. The Social Gospel school of thought focused mostly on social welfare issues of poverty and injustice. It was not a centralized movement, rather a philosophy that spread quickly through religious groups of all kinds that encouraged the use of religion to help solve and alleviate the ills of society. This school of thought at first just added to the practice of sharing the gospel message; however, as time went on this movement became more interested in acting out scripture than preaching it, putting the notion of sin on the collective and not the individual. Some predominate thinkers of this time include Rauschenbusch, who is known for applying sin to the collective and not the individual and Gladden who used this progressive movement to evangelize his community. The other school of thought focused mostly on the message of winning

souls through direct evangelism. Both of these groups over time became more and more separate. Interestingly enough scripture mandates both of these activities. It mandates the church to be a major player in the fight about poverty and injustice and scripture continually mandates that Christ followers proclaim Him as the only way to be reconciled to a Holy God (Matthew 28—the Great Commission). If both schools of thought would have applied to their congregations the whole of scripture in these two areas then there would not have been a divide; however, this was not the case and both schools of thought ignorantly followed their own desire for what they personally thought they ought to be doing.⁷ This is what the author is suggesting a complete read through of scripture when it comes to these issues, so that it is not possible to pick and choose what aspects of scripture we are going to allow to influence our lives without looking at how all the puzzle pieces fit together.

From start to finish, the Bible makes it clear that the poor, the unable and the foreign are to be taken care of by God's people. Scripture gives countless commands to take care of the foreigner and alien. In Leviticus 19: 32-34 God says, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."⁸ These were clear instructions to Moses that He was to guide his people to welcoming everyone into their communities. In this passage God does not delineate between foreigners who worship God or foreigners who worship in a different way. He does not require that they dress a certain way or have certain customs. Instead,

⁷ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, [Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment](http://www.lausanne.org/grand-rapids-1982/lop-21.html#4) Lausanne Occasional Paper 21, 4.A Accessed April 30, 2008 <<http://www.lausanne.org/grand-rapids-1982/lop-21.html#4>>

⁸ The Holy Bible, NIV

God says that they were to treat the foreigner as anyone else who shared their same cultures and ideals.

In Deuteronomy 10:12 Moses calls the Israelites to fear the Lord their God as well as to “walk in all His ways” (Deuteronomy 10:12). He lists several attributes of God and in one of them He mentions the treatment of foreigners:

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

If God’s followers are called to walk in His ways, then we too are called to meet a foreigner’s basic needs. Many of the people who come to the United States in ways other than resettlement are often able to take care of themselves. Refugees who arrive through the R&P program generally arrive with nothing more than the clothes off their backs. The church is called to help people such as these to have the things they need.

What is also interesting to note is that in the Old Testament times, God set up a system for those in need to be self sufficient. Deuteronomy 24:19 says, “when you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”⁹ In Deuteronomy 24:19-22, he repeats this rule with also grape and olive harvesters. This law was put in place so that those who could not grow food for themselves, nor work, would have the opportunity to pick food for themselves. By doing their regular work, harvesters were letting those such as the “aliens” survive.

⁹ The Holy Bible, NIV

One of the most well known stories of the Bible is of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The United Nations (UN) defines a refugee as a person with “a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”.¹⁰ When the Israelite situation with Egypt is examined they can most certainly qualify as refugees. They were leaving the land that they had known and were moving to an unknown region. In this situation, the Bible says that the Lord took care of all their needs directly through instances such as the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) and manna from the sky (Exodus 16:4-5).

Another point that is overlooked when people read about exit of the Israelites from Egypt, is that Israelites were not the only ones that Moses led out of Egypt. In Exodus 12:38, the Bible says that “Many other people went with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.”¹¹ So the Lord chose to save those who were not even a part of His chosen people. This has implications in today’s world as well. The Lord has a desire for his people—the Israelites in testament and the Church today—to care for refugee regardless of their religious conviction.

After 40 years, the Israelites finally do make it to the Promised Land. From there the Lord continued to bless them and prosper them. In passages such as Exodus 23:9, He also constantly reminded them that they were once aliens in Egypt. He tells them this so that they remember how they were treated and in turn can treat the new arrivals in a way that they too would want to be treated. This is on the heart of God both for evangelistic purposes and also simply to care for people.

¹⁰ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Definition of Refugee from the Immigration and Nationality Act, Accessed April 19, 2008
<<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=091a96981298d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=3a82ef4c766fd010VgnVCM1000000ecd190aRCRD>>

¹¹ The Holy Bible, NIV

Scripture is riddled with commands to care for the refugee:

- Exodus 22:21-Do not mistreat the alien
- Exodus 23:9- Do not oppress the alien
- Leviticus 19:10- leave extra produce in the field for the alien
- Leviticus 19:33- Do not mistreat the alien in your land—repeated again for reiteration.
- Leviticus 19:34- The alien must be treated as one of your native born
- Leviticus 24:22- The same laws must apply to the alien and the native born.
- Psalm 146:9- The Lord watches over the alien
- Jeremiah 22:3- Do not wrong or violence to the alien
- Ezekiel 47:23- In whatever tribe the alien settles there you are to give him an inheritance.
- Zechariah 7:10- Do not oppress the alien—repeated again.

In addition, later on in the New Testament the Bible says that all believers are strangers to the world (1 Peter 2:11). The Bible states that if a person is a follower of Christ, their home is not on earth but is in heaven. It says that their time on this planet is temporary. So in both portions of the Bible, God calls His people to empathize with foreigners. So in effect, those who are followers of Christ should know exactly what a refugee would need. They should know that it is not just about getting the basics like food or a job, but it's having that community and support of all those around you. This passage of scripture also commands Christ followers to act in a way becoming of Christ so that others may see their works and come to an understanding of Christ. Scripture is

riddled with commands to not only care for the poor, but to act in a way that would lead a non-Christ follower to Him. This command is reiterated and personified in Christ Himself (Luke 19:10) and in many other passages of scripture. Again, as stated previously, if scripture is going to be used as a tool by which a Christ follower lives by, he or she needs to live up to the standard of all of scripture, not just the parts he or she personally finds the most applicable. Many will find fault with this argument, noting that refugees or others who are served by the church would slowly be coerced into becoming Christ followers. If a Christ follower indeed is to understand, believe and live out the whole of scripture this is not a problem for them—it is their end game. In Matthew 28 Christ in His final command to his followers tell them to preach the gospel to the end of the earth, winning people from every tribe and nation. In the book of Revelation chapter 7, scripture gives a portrayal of the eternal throne where God is seated the author goes to great lengths to mention that there are people giving acclimates to Christ from every tribe and tongue. The connotation is that these are the ones who were reached by Christ's followers intentionally evangelizing them. As you will see in an example of a refugee resettlement program run through a local church, this can be done in a non-invasive, empowering way to the families without churches ever proactively mentioning it.

Also to those who disagree with this notion it is arrogant to think that refugees are not able to enquire and make their own religious decisions. It is also arrogant, especially when someone moves into a new country and has absolutely nothing, to limit the amount of help they can receive from the private community because of an individual or collective opinion on religious values. When a refugee comes they need to be treated like every other person in this place, and make their own decisions.

By far, the most important driving force behind Christians in refugee resettlement is a response from Jesus Christ when asked which the greatest commandment was in Jewish law:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40)¹²

Within American history, the terminology and the dealings of refugees is a relatively modern concept. Pre-WWII, the United States made no delineation between refugees and immigrants. Even during the Armenian genocide in Turkey and the Holocaust.¹³

From 1945 to 1980, the United States did not have any unifying legislation when it came to refugees. During this time period, refugee policy was dominated by Cold War politics. Refugees let in during this time period were from countries such as Hungary, Cuba and Vietnam. Additionally, the federal government found itself at odds with state governments over the care of refugees. The federal government was allowing refugees in but was expecting state governments to take care of them. So after a series of congressional Acts, the federal government was able to give assistance to states to take care of their new citizens.¹⁴

The United States currently defines a refugee as a person who is unable or unwilling to go back to their country of origin “because of persecution or a well-founded

¹² The Holy Bible, NIV

¹³ Bloemraad, Irene. Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada (Berkeley: University of California, 2006) 126-127

¹⁴ Bloemraad, 128

fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion”.¹⁵ While that definition is very broad and seems to encompass thousands of people around the world, the US only admitted 41,279 refugees in 2006. In 2007, there were 48,281 refugees admitted into the United States.¹⁶ But in both years, the ceiling cap for refugees was 70,000. In both years the government let in over 20,000 people less than they had accounted for.

The reason for the discrepancy in the actual versus the government ceiling is the very long and tedious refugee resettlement process. In order for a person to be even considered for refugee resettlement in the United States, they must be considered a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR definition of a refugee is almost identical to the American definition. The issue comes to the nature of mass refugee movements.

Often times refugee migrations are spontaneous events. In many of the more recent refugee migrations organizations such as the UNHCR have not been able to plan ahead and make suitable arrangements for the new arrivals because of the short time frame. Consequently, it is often difficult for them to accurately record all the arrivals. Refugee camps are generally haphazardly organized and are unable to create quick systems of organization. Many of these people do not have passports or forms of identification. In addition, it is often difficult for people to get to the UNHCR offices to register as refugees. In one report, Somali refugees in Kenya were not allowed to leave the camp because they were not registered and they were not registered because they

¹⁵ Office of Refugee Resettlement, Who We Serve accessed April 3, 2008
<<http://www.acf.bhs.gov/programs/orr/about/whoweserve.htm>>

¹⁶ Church World Service, Frequently Asked Questions About Refugees. Accessed April 29, 2008
<<http://churchworldservice.org/Immigration/FAQ.html#7>>

could not get to the UNHCR office.¹⁷ Inconsistencies between governments and the UN make the process difficult and inefficient putting refugees in a virtual limbo.

Once refugees have been given their refugee status by the agency, they have to be recommended for the program by the UNHCR, US embassies or certain agencies which work with refugees overseas. These recommendations allow the refugees to apply for resettlement in the United States. Other countries do also participate in refugee resettlement but the next largest resettlement country (Australia) settled slightly less than a third of the amount the US settled.¹⁸ So by sheer numbers the United States is a more attainable than the other countries.

After these organizations determine who is in need of resettlement they are recommended to the Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) which oversees the refugee resettlement program. Among other things this agency develops the criteria for the refugee entrance into the United States as well as shifts through the applications to determine which cases are brought to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). USCIS assesses the applications and determines whether or not they are eligible for the refugee resettlement process.

Once the USCIS approves a person for an interview, they send officers to the different refugee camp locations to conduct the meetings. Unfortunately, some countries have more interviews than others and so people could wait for many months before an interviewer comes to a country. If their interview goes well and the officer approves their application, they are then officially approved for resettlement.

¹⁷ Lomo, Zachri, School for International Training Lecture, Kampala, Uganda, June 12, 2006

¹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Resettlement Accessed April 22, 2008 <<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/3b8366bc4.html>>

The United States also designates them to a priority number. Priority 1 individuals are those who have imminent danger and need to be removed from their situation immediately. Priority 2 refugees are members of groups that the PRM identifies as “groups of special humanitarian concern”. And Priority 3 members are those who are close family members of select refugees already in the United States.¹⁹

Once they are approved the refugee is assigned to one of 10 organizations which are a part of the Refugee Reception and Placement Program (R&P). These ten agencies are:

- Church World Service (CWS)
- Episcopal Migration Services
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services
- International Rescue Committee
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
- World Relief

It is through these agencies that these refugees will get their first introduction into the United States.

¹⁹ Singer, Audrey and Jill H. Wilson, From ‘There’ to ‘Here’: Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America Metropolitan Policy Program, Washington: The Brookings Institution, Accessed April 22, 2008, pg. 4

Volunteer Agencies (VOLAGS) are agencies who have signed a cooperative agreement with the United States agreeing to resettle the refugees in the US. The agreement outlines their responsibilities to the government as well as the refugees. Among the regulations is the promise that any faith-based activities should be held separately from the government funded programs.²⁰ As has been stated and will continue to be argued Christians do not have a problem with this because any type of work that they do with a refugee or any services they support would not be funded by the government so there would be no legal injunction to any situation where a refugee would over the course of time become a Christian.

The agreement does not bind the government to fund all of the refugees' needs. In fact, it is up to the VOLAG to meet the remaining needs of the refugee. Each refugee agency is given 800 dollars for each refugee that arrives. According to resettlement worker, this number has not really changed since the 1980's even with inflation and the higher cost of living. For a term of no less than thirty days, the agencies are required to provide:

1. "Decent, safe and sanitary housing;
2. Essential furnishings;
3. Food or a food allowance and other basic necessities;
4. Necessary clothing;
5. Referral to appropriate health programs and screening;
6. Assistance in applying for social security cards;

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, FY 2008 Reception and Placement Basic Terms of the Cooperative Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the (Name of Organization) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, January 17, 2008 accessed April 23, 2008 <<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/2008/99438.htm>>

7. Assistance in registering children for school; and
8. Transportation to job interviews and job training. “²¹

In addition to these basic needs support they are also required to get the client acclimated with public services, the citizenship process, help them find employment and other resettlement logistics such as paying back their airfare after their trip. While this is a long list of tasks for each refugee, it is in no way exhaustive of all refugee needs.²²

Often times the refugees are settled in areas where there is already family or there are close relations nearby. This is because many of the refugees arrive in the family reunification program on the P3 status. These refugees make up approximately 20 percent of the refugees who come to the US.²³ For the rest of the refugees, VOLAGS attempt place them wherever there are people from similar countries. This relieves some of the burden from the VOLAG when it comes to resettlement and allows them to target their resources more towards those who do not have family present are essentially alone when they arrive.

As their cooperative agreement states, VOLAGs are responsible for directing the refugees to quickly get established in the US with everything from schools to apartments to government assistance. These refugees are coming from situations where they’ve been almost completely stripped of their rights and responsibilities. Many of the refugees who come to the US have nothing except for the small bag they carried onto the plane. These VOLAGS are supposed to take these refugees and quickly show them how to survive in this completely foreign environment while forcing them to become immediately independent.

²¹ Cooperative Agreement, Section 2.4- Basic Needs Support

²² Cooperative Agreement

²³ http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20060925_singer.pdf

For these organizations the aid only lasts for so long. They are able to pay the rent of their new clients for about 4 months. As stated before, the VOLAG agencies are only given 800 dollars for each arrival. This money must cover their rent, food, home set up and any other immediate needs. In addition, that money is also used for administrative costs. For families with multiple children it becomes a little easier to settle them because of the additional government aid. But as pointed out by Jen Smyers of Church World Service, for those refugees who come alone or who come with one additional person, the funds sometimes do not even cover the rent. So in order to supplement the pittance given by the government, these agencies depend on private funds and donations. After the first 90 days in which VOLAGs such as CWS take care of the refugees, the consistent aid stops. The agencies attempt to help them as best they can but as non-profits, the funds are limited. Fortunately, government assistance in the forms of services such as food stamps continues for eight more months.²⁴

It is during this whole process that the Christian church can be of the greatest use. While it can and should be argued that the Church needs to be involved long before a refugee comes to the US, this paper will not deal with this other than to say Christ followers when following the whole of scripture have an incredible burden to serve all of humanity in the same way that Christ served humanity when He willingly gave Himself up for it on the cross so that man could be reconciled to God. In the same way Christ followers need to be willing to do the same, give up of themselves to serve all of humanity, they are commanded to do so (Ephesians 5).

When individuals and families are resettled with VOLAGs they are dependent on their case managers. These managers in turn have other families as well as administrative

²⁴ Smyers, Jen. Personal Interview

tasks to go through. As a result scared and often times helpless refugees are left to fend for themselves with out the comfort of a guiding hand.

The church is a body of believers from all stages with all walks of life. The people that are part of the church are also parts of families, businesses, couples, schools and community groups. In the majority of churches a person would be able to find at least one person who could fulfill a certain need, whether it be medical, social or even spiritual. There are not very many social groups (excluding some other religions) in the country where this many people can be found with these many gifts.

Additionally, the church is called to help those in need, especially those who are new to the country. Throughout the Bible there are countless instances where the Lord calls on His people to break down the barriers that they put up between cultures and to love and aid those who are different from them.

Churches can bridge the connection between what the refugee resettlement agencies can do and what the government thinks they can do. These refugees are resettled into poverty. They are given the bare minimum of needs and are given a short time to mentally, financially and physically adjust to the United States before they are pushed out into society. While VOLAGs do their best to make these refugees as comfortable as possible but there is only so far refugees can go.²⁵

The Christian church is founded on principles that call it to support those in need. From the beginning to the end, refugees need help in every area. Churches around the country are already helping out when it comes to setting up refugee living spaces. With the small amount of money that the government gives (800 dollars per person) to refugee resettlement agencies, these VOLAGs are unable to truly furnish living spaces in the

²⁵ Smyers, Jen, Personal Interview, April 25, 2008

ways that will make the families uncomfortable. These agencies must rely on outside help to finish furnishing the apartments. But from personal experience at a refugee agency, it is painful to see how little these agencies have to work with when it comes time for an arrival.

Agencies often times do not find out that a refugee family is arriving until right before they come. Churches have their own networks of people and resources who could quickly garner the supplies needed for a new refugee family. Whether it is through clothing drives or food pantries, churches can provide the necessary support quickly

After the refugees arrive they are sent through a whirlwind of tasks in order to be fully resettled. They require trips to government offices, doctor's offices, grocery stores and resettlement offices. They are supposed to go to English as a Second language classes and public school to enroll their children. All of these activities require guidance, directions and often times transportation. For those members of congregations who cannot support refugees financially they can help support them with their time. For a person who has never been on public transportation, it can be daunting figuring out how to get from one place to the next. Or in situations when government officials are explaining to them the various forms and programs, it helps to have a friendly face in the room to not only clarify things but to also support them.

After the initial month or so, the refugees are now ready to look for employment. Within the same group of church members who assist these refugees from the beginning, there are most likely business owners or at the very least, people with connections to entry level jobs that these new arrivals can apply for. These Christians are called not only to help the refugees but to befriend them and to love them. Ideally these new friendships

will allow the church volunteers to not only help the refugees in their job searches but to help them with job skills as well. Instead, of going to job interviews without any guidance, these refugees can be helped every step of the way.

For children, churches provide the best support when it comes to child development and providing a positive atmosphere. Many churches have youth groups and youth activities with which refugee children can get involved in quickly. These children will not only be able to start off with a support system from home, but will also be able to have peers their age teaching them and showing them how to be a child in the United States. These children are coming from situations vastly different from each other and can learn through experience how to live in their new environment.

The most important thing that churches can provide is even beyond the first 90 days and beyond the end of VOLAG support. They can provide lasting friendships and a new family. Unlike arbitrary volunteers who work with resettlement agencies, people from the Christian Church come along with entire networks of others who are called to serve those in need. As Christ followers, these people are called to always be there regardless of the refugee's faith and circumstance in life. At some point in the process they will pass from being just a refugee, to being their friend because as Christians the church is called not to make people social cases but to treat all people equally making no one above or below the other.

James Misner, Director of Community Outreach for McLean Bible Church's Uptown Campus in Washington DC, has led a volunteer initiative from his church that is partnering with the IRC to help resettle refugees in the DC/MD area. This program started 9 months prior to the writing of this paper and is currently working with 17

refugee families from 9 different countries around the world. Volunteers go through a vetting process in this ‘ministry’ and are paired with a refugee family. They then visit the family once every week. Their primary objective is to befriend the families in order to help the families begin a social network but they also do much more. A list of common tasks for a volunteer includes:

- Teaching families how to use public transportation
- Teaching families how to use house hold appliances
- Teaching families how to navigate socially and culturally in the US
- Teaching families how to use computers
- Teaching families English
- Proactively introducing family to their neighbors and community members who can assist them in receiving a job.

The volunteers work closely with the IRC and are given some technical training; however, they mostly observe and fill in the gaps that are left by the resettlement agency. Misner and the Church openly admit that they are active in this program for 2 reasons. Their first reason, is to be Christ’s agents serving the poor and the needy right “in their own backyard”. And also over time to win these families for Christ. However, the volunteers are under strict rules not to proactively “witness” to their families verbally. Misner says that usually after a period of time a refugee family will ask the volunteers why they are serving them and being so gracious. That is the period of time where the volunteers are allowed to openly share their faith in this program. Once a relationship has been built and once the refugee asks volunteers share that they are motivated to serve the refugee’s because it is an act of thanks to God for how He served them through

sending Christ to reconcile them to Himself. Misner says that his group has never actually invited a refugee to come to their church; however, after a period of time most of them ask to come on their own.²⁶

Misner noted that most scholars agree the best way to “do development” is grassroots, and that is what this program is doing. He also noted that the church is the largest grass roots organization in the world by far. His program is equipping volunteers, a community; to recognize that they have the wherewithal they need to come behind their poor and needy and to effectively change the outcome of a situation. Misner also noted that the families the church’s volunteers work with have an easier time getting a job, an easier time learning English and have a support system in place when they do not have enough month to month some times because of an emergency than families he has visited with out volunteers in place.

However, Christians as a whole have not always had a positive image when it comes to reaching out to those in need. In fact around the world, Christians have been viewed as the cause of many of the problems that arise to push out refugees in the first place.

One major instance currently is the Iraq war. While the war is not explicitly religious, there are religious underpinnings. The United States is currently viewed as a ‘Christian nation’ in the eyes of the Iraqi people. As a “Christian” nation, the United States automatically comes at odds with traditional Islam. Ingrid Mattson explains that traditional Islam refers to states which are based on *Shari’ah* law to be “abodes of peace”. Those lands, such as the United States, which are not based on *Shari’ah* law are called

²⁶ Misner, James. Personal Interview, March 03, 2008

“abodes of disbelief”. The Quran calls followers of Islam to stay away from these places because it weakens their faith.²⁷

According to Mattson, “those Muslim immigrants to America who are influenced by these...juridical concepts will obviously strongly resist integration, for American can be defined only in absolute negative terms.”²⁸ The reasons for American resistance do not solely rest on culture. American culture is only a symptom of the beliefs that its people hold. It is these beliefs and the departure from Islam that cause more traditional Islamic refugees to shy away from America and its culture.

While there are many more mainstream Muslims who cross the border into the United States, this “us vs. them” mentality can permeate throughout the group. Muslim activists have revived term *Jahiliyyah* which they apply to both “political regimes they consider oppressive and cultures they consider pagan and hedonistic.”²⁹ So for the more mainstream followers of Islam, the United States can be seen as a threat to not only their religion but their culture as well. As a result, the tendency to isolate themselves in small pockets within the United States becomes much greater. Refugees already have the tendency to settle and remain with those from the same background and so the threat of a Jahili country heightens the need for a homogenous society. With the continuing problems in the Middle East the United States is going to see an increasing amount of applications to resettle in the US.

It must be said that not all followers of Islam follow this line of thinking. It is true some do hate the United States because of its lack of Islamic influence while others may

²⁷ Mattson, Ingrid. *How Muslims Use Islamic Paradigms to Define America Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish , and Muslim Experiences in the United States* ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2003, pg 203

²⁸ Mattson, 199

²⁹ Mattson, 203

dislike the States because of it's different culture. But there are also many who come to the United States and share it's ideals of pluralism. Where they accept the fact that many people in the United States are not Muslim and hope that others in the US will not discriminate against them because they are. That being said, the "Christian" nation of the US must be aware that its very nature goes against what some Muslims believe.

So what would happen if churches became support agencies? Churches are all over the country ranging from small towns to large cities. The Bible-based churches in particular are generally always looking for ways to serve the community. There are consistent money flows and stable familial guidance in the church body. Churches as a whole contain people from all walks of life and so they can almost always cover the social needs that refugees have.

Those who oppose churches working with refugees would point to the religions of the various refugee groups who come to the United States. They would look at the current conflicts in the Middle East with Iraq and Afghanistan and say that having Christians volunteer with the resettlement agencies the refugees could further harm the adjustment process of these followers of Islam who have been essentially displaced by a "Christian" nation.

Misner disagrees with this. His volunteers have worked with both Iraqi, Iranian, Pakistani and Afghani refugee's. Once the refugee's learn enough English to have a solid conversation and learn that their volunteers are all part of the same church the refugee's are usually shocked says Misner. They are surprised that the volunteers did not forcefully try to convert them or change their religious activities. Volunteers often tell ministry leaders that the cross cultural dialogue had between themselves and the

refugee's is enlightening, it breaks down misconceptions that the west has towards the Muslim world and that the Muslim world has about the west. Misner does also say that all of these families have visited his church at least once.

Christians have never been called to help just Christians. In fact, during Christ's time on earth He created scandals by touching and speaking with people who were considered unclean by the Jewish elite or even just the gentiles. He knew no boundaries when it came to showing people love. If Christians are to model Christ they must lead by His example. Many of His miracles in the Bible were done to serve someone in need. It was through serving this need that many of them came to Christ or even began to understand who He was, it is in this way that the Church should serve the poor—meeting their needs in order that those they serve can have a way in which to view Christ. .

There are many in the United States who would frown upon any sort of religious influence on refugees. In the past Christianity has been used as a sort of western colonialism. Christianity was used as an excuse to conquer and ruin vast cultures on continents such as South America and Africa. Consequently, the idea of Christians influencing groups of Somali refugees does take a somewhat colonialists standpoint.

Granted there are limits to what a Christian church can do when it comes to mixing the religions. They can witness by sharing the love that is part of the culture and if the opportunity arises (such as the refugee asking) they should be able to explain what Christianity is about. The care of the refugee should not be based on what his or her faith background is. It should be based on the fact that the faith that they follow calls them to help these refugees. Additionally, it should be made clear to the refugee that no matter what they believe they will be given the help that they need.

But to assume that a person must be put in a religiously neutral environment does come across elitist. It is making the assumption that a refugee cannot think for themselves. It is making the assumption that these people who have spent months and years waiting to come to the United States, are not strong enough to make their own decisions when it comes to faith and the practice of faith. It creates religious bubbles where no one is allowed to truly get to know the other person for fear of alienation.

The most recent data for the top 5 countries of origin for refugees in FY2008 is as follows:

Figure 1

Top Countries for Fiscal Year 2008 (As of 2.29.2008)

Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted Refugees
Burma	2895	20.35%
Iran	2397	16.85%
Iraq	1876	13.19%
Burundi	1781	12.52%
Cuba	1460	10.26%
	10409	73.17%

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While the religious make up of Cuba can only be speculated, the other four countries can be speculated because of the government crackdowns on both information and religion . The Iraqi refugees are mostly Muslim. They are fleeing form sectarian violence in their country and have wound up in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. The Iranian refugees are often times religious minorities in the country. This group includes Bahá'ís and some Christians.³¹ The Burmese refugees are a mixture of Buddhist

³⁰ Cultural Orientation Resource Center, US Refugee Program: Statistics Accessed March 30, 2008 <<http://www.cal.org/co/refugee/statistics/index.html>>

³¹ Hakimzadeh, Shirin, Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home Migration Information Source, accessed March 28, 2008 <<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?>

and Christian refugees from the Burman, Karen and Chin ethnic groups.³² A Burundian refugees are more likely to align themselves with Christianity.

This number base changes the outlook of what the refugee situation was previously. In 2006 the top refugees included former soviet states and Somalia which have high Muslim populations who are forced to become refugees. So far in this fiscal year, it seems that the refugees are more diverse with a large amount being from a Christian background.

While it does not matter what the religions are of the refugees, it creates a greater urgency within the church to help these refugees. Many of the refugees are fleeing because of their religion and unlike some of the other refugees that come they could benefit from the camaraderie of faith they have with those who are resettling them. This is not to say that those who come from a non-Christian faith would have any less help, attention and care than those who are Christian.

As is evident, the five countries in Figure 1 represent the top five countries of origin for the refugees resettled as of the end of February. These countries make up over 73% of the total number of refugees admitted. Of these elite five, Iran and Iraq make up over 40% of the entrants. It is hard to see how the next several months will play out in this fiscal year. While the government has promised to set aside 12,000 refugee spots open for Iraqis³³ the end figure could tell quite a different story. After September 11, 2001, the United States enhanced the security measures to invite people into the United States for refugee resettlement. In FY2001, the refugee admissions rate was 69,304

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³² Barron, Sandy et al. Refugees from Burma: Their Backgrounds and Refugee Experiences Center for Applied Linguistics Accessed April 20, 2008 < <http://www.cal.org/co/pdf/RefugeesfromBurma.pdf>> pg 3.

³³ Keyes, Charley and Elise Labott, State Department vows to Resettle 12,000 Iraqi Refugees CNN.com, February 4, 2008 <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/02/04/us.iraq.refugees/index.html>

people and subsequently plunged to 27, 110 people in FY2002. Unfortunately, even with the high ceiling numbers in the pre-9/11 America, the US was unable to even come close to reaching their ceiling.³⁴

The implications for this are widespread. If history serves correctly, yearly quotas are almost never met. So as the United States reaches the half way mark of the fiscal year, it could see the same breakdown in entrants. If so that would mean that the chances of a VOLAG or support agency working with someone not in the top 5 would be very rare because these five countries hold the greatest share of refugees. (See Annex B)

What can Churches do?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a theory which seeks to explain a person's behavior. Abraham Maslow believed that all motivation in life depends on 5 certain needs (in order): Physiological, safety, love, esteem and self actualization. He believes that after one need is met another need emerges. So when a person has their physiological needs met (i.e. food and water), their need for a safety (i.e. jobs, government welfare) emerge.

This hierarchy can be applied to refugees that come to the United States. When they first arrival, the government and the VOLAGs are able to fulfill their first two needs. Granted much of the actual fulfillment rests on the refugees themselves but these agencies do help them get to that point.

The other needs (love, esteem and self actualization) are needs that the church can help the refugees fulfill. Elsa Amboy of the NAME ministry in PLACE refers to the church as giving "life support" to the refugees. She delineates that VOLAGS can do all

³⁴Bruno, Andorra, Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy CRS Report for Congress, January 25, 2006 <http://www.ilw.com/immigdaily/news/2006.0215-crs.pdf>, pg 5-6

the logistical aspects of the refugees lives, but the church can provide that community and support long after their time with the agency is finished.³⁵

There are various ways that churches can be life support. Church ministries such as the Tucson Refugee Ministry in Arizona have recruit volunteers for a variety of tasks with varying commitments. For those who may not be able to make a long term commitment they can help out by furnishing apartments or throwing a baby shower for expectant families. For those who are able to devote more time to refugees, they also offer group adoption. This allows multiple people and families from various backgrounds to pour into the refugees that arrive. By working together, the group is able to better serve the refugees without the potential of burning out. In addition the refugees are able to resettle with an immediate group of friends to learn from.

According to Maslow's theory, this ministry allows the refugees to achieve both love needs and esteem needs. The love need is the need to be affiliated with someone or the need to be accepted by a group of people. If a ministry is welcoming of a refugee regardless of their religion, background or even their situation, they have accepted that person for who they are and met them at their need. Jesus Christ exemplified that in His ministry and provides the perfect example for His followers in how to approach people.

According to Maslow's theory, by meeting the need for love refugees will move to the esteem level. After all their other needs are filled, Maslow's theory predicts that a person will have the need to achieve something or to get recognition. This could be in the form of getting a job or going to school. By this time they have the support base and the right foundation to truly prosper in the United States.

³⁵ Amboy, Elsa, Personal Interview, April 1 2008

Refugees that arrive in the United States come with almost nothing except the clothes on their back and the few pieces of paper that allow them to come to the United States. While they are inevitably excited about the move, it is such a drastic transition to a world unlike anything they have been through before. Mclean Bible Church Uptown refugee ministry leader, James Misner, recalls a story of a young Burundian couple who first came to the United States. He said that before they arrived in the United States, they had never had running water or electricity. When they first arrived in their apartment the volunteers had to teach them how to turn the lights on and off. The parents were afraid of the bath tub and the toilet because they thought their children would go down the holes. At one point in time, the father asked a volunteer if he could remove the door to his apartment because in their refugee camp no one ever had a door to their home.³⁶ His volunteers have been working with this family since they arrived in August of 2007. Both of the parents now have jobs and are speaking good conversational English and their two daughters are enrolled in school and regularly attending. The parents in this family were both born in a Burundian refugee camp in Tanzania and have never seen their home country. They lived their entire life in a UN camp and now just after a few short months are almost fully functioning in their new home and the volunteers from this ministry are viewing themselves more as friends with the family than as volunteers.

Events such as these happen on a normal basis with refugees. They need the guidance of patient friends who will steer them through the new world to which they have entered. On the flip side Christians around the world are called to help those who are in foreign environments. They are called to show Jesus' love to the world through any means they can.

³⁶ Misner, James. Personal Interview, March 03, 2008

The Christian church is in a unique position where its very structure is based on followers conforming their lives to Christ and the example He has set. The church has people from all walks of life with various skills and abilities which allow them to help refugees in almost every way imaginable. Many of the ministries that the church already has (i.e. English a Second Language, childcare) are essential to the refugee process.

While issues can potentially arise with a faith based organization having that much involvement in refugee resettlement, it does allow the resource strapped refugee resettlement program the freedom to truly pour into the refugees that come and allows them to become self sufficient and successful members of society.

ANNEX A

US Refugee Resettlement Data (2006)		
Country	Number of Refugees	Percentage of Total Refugees
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	10453	25.462%
Somalia	10330	25.163%

Cuba	3142	7.654%
Vietnam	3002	7.312%
Iran	2785	6.784%
Liberia	2366	5.763%
Sudan	1895	4.616%
Burma	1323	3.223%
Ethiopia	1262	3.074%
Laos	815	1.985%
Total	37373	91.036%

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Annex B

Refugee Entries as of 2/29/2008

AFRICA				
Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted	% of Ceiling	% of Total Entrants
Burundi	1781	46.10%	11.13%	12.52%
Liberia	764	19.78%	4.78%	5.37%
Somalia	687	17.78%	4.29%	4.83%
Sudan	208	5.38%	1.30%	1.46%
Ethiopia	122	3.16%	0.76%	0.86%
DRC	107	2.77%	0.67%	0.75%
Eritrea	52	1.35%	0.33%	0.37%
Sierra Leone	29	0.75%	0.18%	0.20%
Congo	25	0.65%	0.16%	0.18%
Togo	24	0.62%	0.15%	0.17%
Rwanda	15	0.39%	0.09%	0.11%

³⁷ Data Extrapolated from: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families Office of Refugee Resettlement: Fiscal Year 2006 Refugee Arrivals, Accessed March 21, 2008 <<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/data/fy2006RA.htm>>

Uganda	15	0.39%	0.09%	0.11%
Ivory Coast	12	0.31%	0.08%	0.08%
Mauritania	10	0.26%	0.06%	0.07%
Nigeria	5	0.13%	0.03%	0.04%
Cameroon	2	0.05%	0.01%	0.01%
Gambia	2	0.05%	0.01%	0.01%
Guinea	2	0.05%	0.01%	0.01%
Niger	1	0.03%	0.01%	0.01%
TOTAL				
AFRICA	3863	100.00%	24.14%	27.16%

EAST ASIA				
Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted	% of Ceiling	% of Total Entrants
Burma	2895	87.38%	14.48%	20.35%
Vietnam	339	10.23%	1.70%	2.38%
Laos	36	1.09%	0.18%	0.25%
China	29	0.88%	0.15%	0.20%
Cambodia	8	0.24%	0.04%	0.06%
North Korea	6	0.18%	0.03%	0.04%
TOTAL E.				
ASIA	3313	100.00%	16.57%	23.29%

EUROPE				
Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted	% of Ceiling	% of Total Entrants
Ukraine	545	54.01%	18.17%	3.83%
Moldova	170	16.85%	5.67%	1.20%
Russia	160	15.86%	5.33%	1.12%
Uzbekistan	48	4.76%	1.60%	0.34%
Belarus	33	3.27%	1.10%	0.23%
Kazakhstan	18	1.78%	0.60%	0.13%
Azerbaijan	13	1.29%	0.43%	0.09%
Armenia	9	0.89%	0.30%	0.06%
Kyrgyzstan	9	0.89%	0.30%	0.06%
Estonia	2	0.20%	0.07%	0.01%
Serbia	1	0.10%	0.03%	0.01%
Tajikistan	1	0.10%	0.03%	0.01%
TOTAL				
EUROPE	1009	100.00%	33.63%	

LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN				
Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted	% of Ceiling	% of Total Entrants
Columbia	43	2.86%	1.43%	0.30%
Cuba	1460	96.95%	48.67%	10.26%

Ecuador	3	0.20%	0.10%	0.02%
Total LAC	1506	100.00%	50.20%	10.59%

NEAR EAST & SOUTH ASIA				
Country of Origin	Number Admitted	% of Total Admitted	% of Ceiling	% of Total Entrants
Iran	2397	52.87%	8.56%	16.85%
Iraq	1876	41.38%	6.70%	13.19%
Afghanistan	188	4.15%	0.67%	1.32%
Pakistan	32	0.71%	0.11%	0.22%
Syria	14	0.31%	0.05%	0.10%
Palestine	9	0.20%	0.03%	0.06%
Tibet	7	0.15%	0.03%	0.05%
Bhutan	4	0.09%	0.01%	0.03%
Nepal	3	0.07%	0.01%	0.02%
Egypt	2	0.04%	0.01%	0.01%
Lebanon	1	0.02%	0.00%	0.01%
Sri Lanka	1	0.02%	0.00%	0.01%
TOTAL NESA	4534	100.00%	16.19%	31.87%

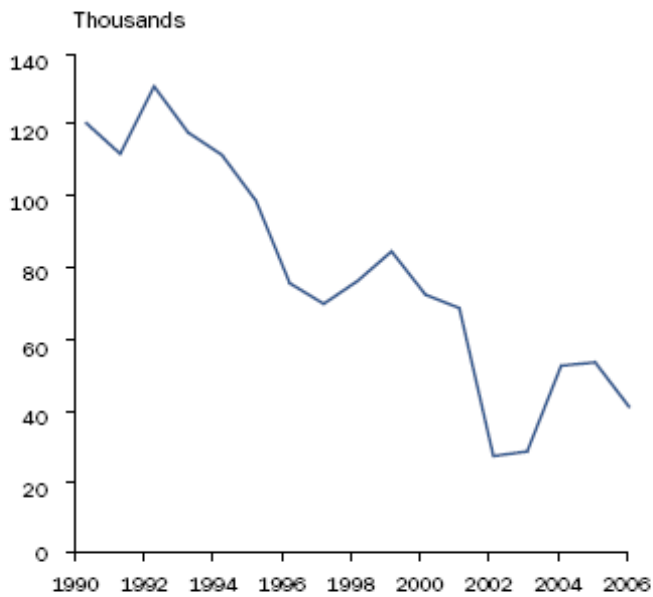
TOTAL OVERALL	14225	17.78%
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Annex C

³⁸ Cultural Orientation Resource Center, [US Refugee Program: Statistics](http://www.cal.org/co/refugee/statistics/index.html) Accessed March 30, 2008 <
<http://www.cal.org/co/refugee/statistics/index.html>>

Figure 1.
**Refugee Admissions to the United States:
1990 to 2006**



Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

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