

*...they have not looked  
you in the eye...*



**Reflections for Catholic Schools  
Refugee Week 2022**

The individual names and faces in this resource are not real.  
However, the stories and experiences are.  
They are shared by too many people seeking safety from persecution and war.

These accounts illustrate the circumstances and experiences of men and women coming from countries which appear in the UK Home Office data recording the 'Top 10' countries of origin for people requesting asylum. They reflect a range of 'convention reasons', as defined by the Convention on the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention) 1951, commonly known as 'the Refugee Convention'.

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@zalmuary (Cover), @gift\_habeshaw (Tekle's Story), @catalinpop (Mariam's Story), @thanhtranpt (Thai's Story), @sebghatullah\_moid (Abdul's Story), @paladin\_04 (Alejandra's Story), @enginakyurt (Back cover)

***“Those who are afraid of you have not looked you in the eye.  
Those who are afraid of you have not seen your faces.  
Those who fear you have not seen your children.  
They have forgotten that dignity and freedom transcend fear and division.”***

These are the words that Pope Francis used when he met with refugees at the Mytilene reception centre on Lesbos, Greece in December 2021. We currently have the highest numbers of displaced people in human history, and the causes; war, persecution, extreme poverty and the climate crisis remain unaddressed.

Refugee Week takes place around World Refugee Day (20<sup>th</sup> June). It is an annual festival which celebrates the contribution of refugees to society in Scotland, enables people from different backgrounds to connect beyond labels, as well as encouraging understanding of why people are displaced, and the challenges they face when seeking safety.

The five reflections that follow are intended to highlight the experiences and challenges of people seeking asylum. They are designed for use in Catholic schools for Refugee Week (20<sup>th</sup>—24<sup>th</sup> June 2022). Each one is accompanied by quotations from Pope Francis, and a short prayer. Perfect for use in form time/ assemblies each morning.

To learn more about Refugee Week please visit

[refugeeweek.org.uk](http://refugeeweek.org.uk)

[scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](http://scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

[refugeefestivalscotland.org.uk](http://refugeefestivalscotland.org.uk)

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[www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk](http://www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk)



Tekle

## The words of Pope Francis

I ask God to rouse us from our disregard for those who are suffering, to shake us from an individualism that excludes others, to awaken hearts that are deaf to the needs of our neighbours. I ask every man and woman, all of us, to overcome the paralysis of fear, the indifference that kills, the cynical disregard that nonchalantly condemns to death those on the fringes!

*Address to Refugees in Mytilene, Apostolic Journey to Greece and Cyprus, December 2021*

### *Tekle's Story*

My name is Tekle, I am from Asmara in Eritrea. To complete high school in my country you are sent away to a military training camp called Sawa, and then you must spend your life in 'military service'. I am a Pentecostal Christian, and our faith does not allow us to fight, or join the military. My parents were scared I would be put in prison like a lot of people from our church, so they borrowed money to send me out of the country. I was smuggled to Sudan, and then across the desert into Libya. We were held in a prison for several weeks. I was told to contact my parents for more money. When I said they didn't have it they beat me and said they would keep me locked up until someone paid. An uncle was able to help, and now they have taken me to a boat. It looks too small to make it all the way to Europe, and there are too many people on board. I'm scared. I don't know how to swim. I just want to finish my education and be allowed to practice my faith in peace.

### Prayer

Father,

As we celebrate World Refugee Day we gather here, free to study, to believe, to live, and to love in peace. We remember all those who are denied these rights, who live in fear of being persecuted just for being who they are. Help us to remember that we are all made in your image, and to see it each day in all those around us.

Amen

# Mariam



# The words of Pope Francis

Wars shatter so many lives. I think especially of children robbed of their childhood.

*@Pontifex (Pope Francis' twitter account) 18 January 2014*

## *Mariam's Story*

My name is Mariam. I am from Aleppo in Syria. I was 7 years old when the civil war started. My father was a doctor, and was accused of assisting a terrorist group, when all he did was treat a man who came to his hospital injured, as any doctor would. We left Syria and were on the move for a long time. I think we stayed in Turkey for a while, but my parents weren't able to work and I couldn't go to school. My grandmother in the UK sent us money and we arranged to travel in a lorry to the UK. Our passports were taken from us, and I was separated from my parents. Eventually I found myself in France, and I was living on the streets of Calais. After several months I heard from my family. It turns out my parents made it to the UK. They are safe with my grandma. I was so happy when I heard they were alive. They asked the Home Office if I could have permission to join them. We were told 'no'; I turned 18 six weeks ago, so I'm now an adult and the government won't help me. I'm 26 miles from my family in the UK. On a sunny day I can see Dover just across the Channel. 26 miles, but I might as well still be trapped in Syria.

## **Prayer**

Father,

This morning we remember all the families who have been ripped apart by conflict and war. The brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents who live not knowing where their loved ones are, or if they are safe. Bring comfort to those who are left, and watch over those who are still seeking a place of safety.

Amen

Khairi





## The words of Pope Francis

Therefore, we declare on each and every one of our creeds that modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution, and organ trafficking, is a crime against humanity. Its victims are from all walks of life, but are most frequently among the poorest and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. On behalf of all of them, our communities of faith are called to reject, without exception, any systematic deprivation of individual freedom for the purposes of personal or commercial exploitation.

*Declaration on International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2 December 2014*

### *Khai's Story*

My name is Khai, I'm from Yên Bái, a village in northern Vietnam. After my father died we had no money and my mother couldn't afford to feed me and all my brothers and sisters. A woman in our village was saying that she could find work for people; we'd be well paid and looked after. My mother agreed that I could go, she was given 500,000 dong as an advance on my wages. It was a lot of money; I hoped that my new job would support my family. I was taken to Hanoi and from there I was taken on a plane. I came to a country, I know now it is the UK, but at the time I didn't know where I was. I was put in a house with some other boys. We were never allowed to go outside. We were growing plants for some men. They smelt horrible, but we had to live in the room with them all the time. One day the police raided the house. They refused to believe me when I told them I was 17. I was arrested and charged with growing cannabis. They tell me that I'm going to prison. I told my lawyer my story, she told me that 500,000 Vietnamese dong is about £20. I don't think that's a lot of money for my life.

### Prayer

Father,

This morning we keep in mind all those who are trapped in slavery. We acknowledge that our lifestyle, our food, our clothing too often rely on exploited labour, and our comfort is built on the misery of others. We repent that too often we choose not to see the suffering in our society. Keep us mindful of those who are denied their freedom, and grant to all who uphold the law compassion for the victims.

Amen

# Abdul



## The words of Pope Francis

Let us stop ignoring reality, stop constantly shifting responsibility, stop passing off the issue of migration to others, as if it mattered to no one and was only a pointless burden to be shouldered by somebody else!

*Address to Refugees in Mytilene, Apostolic Journey to Greece and Cyprus, December 2021*

### *Abdul's Story*

My name is Abdul, I'm from Afghanistan. My favourite subject at school was always English, and when I started working I helped charities and the British army as a translator when we were rebuilding my country. Last year the Taliban took control of Kabul. Anyone who worked with foreign groups is accused of being a traitor. I had to leave my parents and escaped to Turkey. My former colleagues in the UK told me that the government would help me so I travelled across Europe and got to France. When I got there I was told to claim asylum in France. But I don't speak French, and would struggle to work or contribute there. One night I hid under a lorry, and was lucky enough to get to England. I told the officer who interviewed me about working with the British back in Afghanistan. She was sympathetic, but told me that because I didn't come to the UK the "right way" my claim for asylum won't be considered anymore. The government wants to send me to Rwanda now. All I want is to live in peace. That's what I was told life was about by the British people who worked with me back home...

### Prayer

Father,

This morning we keep in mind both those who are displaced, and those who can offer a welcome. We remember that Jesus is present in the abandoned, the displaced, and the rejected. We pray especially for our government. May they turn from rejecting those in need, to protecting them. May they offer welcome and hospitality, not hatred and distrust. May their eyes be opened to the dignity and humanity in every man, woman and child seeking safety, and uphold the rights of all asylum seekers, not try to send them far away to be the concern of others.

Amen

# Alejandra



## The words of Pope Francis

Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.

*Fratelli tutti*

### *Alejandra's Story*

My name is Alejandra, I'm from San Salvador. In my country you don't know if you'll make it home alive at the end of the day. The gangs don't just target rival gangs, they target everyone. My father had gone to the US to work, but that didn't help. My family was targeted because they believed he would be sending us money. We had seen this before, they threatened to kidnap someone, probably mum first, and if you don't pay family are executed as a warning, or someone else is taken. We couldn't pay, and the police are controlled by the gangs, so they couldn't help. My mum decided we had to leave. For the last few years going to the US has been impossible, but she had friends in Glasgow from when she was a student. We used the last of our money to get the visas and flights. When the plane landed we asked for asylum immediately. We asked about going to Scotland where my mum's friends are, but we were told we don't get a choice. We have been living in a hotel for 6 months now. I still can't attend school, my mum doesn't want us to go outside. I feel like I've been waiting forever.

## Prayer

Lord God, help us to remember those who tonight will go to sleep unfed and unwelcome, strangers in foreign lands, people who have fled for their lives and are far from their homes.

We lift up to you those who are escaping persecution and conflict, having fled death, torture or ruthless exploitation. Lord Jesus, give us more of your compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation, and help us follow your lead in seeking justice and mercy.

We pray for an end to the wars, poverty and human rights abuses that drive desperate people to become refugees in the first place.

We give thanks for people working in troubled countries and ask for more of your blessing so we can bring life, dignity and hope to those that remain.

We thank you that you are Lord of all the earth and all its people are loved by you. We pray these things in the name of your Son who was himself born into the troubled life of a refugee.

Amen



**Justice and Peace Scotland**  
*Ceartas agus Sith*

[www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk](http://www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk)

