

## **Bishop Scott Mayer on Christian duty to help refugees**

Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth

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“I was a stranger and you took me in.” Matthew 25:35

In the wake of the violence in Paris this past weekend, several governors, including the governor of Texas, have stated they will not accept Syrian refugees into their states. While states do not have the authority to overrule the federal government on the admission of refugees, a principle established by more than one Supreme Court decision and by the Refugee Act of 1980, state officials may be able to make the work of refugee resettlement more difficult.

They may do this by refusing to allow state agencies to help non-profit, social service agencies and church groups who are doing the work of refugee relief and resettlement in our communities. As a result, people of faith who are working to help refugees fleeing from terrorism or in some way supporting that work may not only find their jobs made more difficult, but also find themselves alarmed or discouraged.

I write to encourage them to stay grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the promise of our Lord Jesus: “I am always with you.” I write also to reassure them that their work is well grounded not only in U.S. law but also in Holy Scripture:

*Matthew 25:35* I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

*Leviticus 19:34* The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

*Hebrews 13:1* Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

*Colossians 3:11* In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

*Romans 12:13* Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

*Ezekiel 16:49* This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

Remember that we are followers of one who was himself a refugee. As we move into the Advent Season in the midst of this backlash against refugees, the story of how the infant Jesus, his mother Mary, and Joseph were forced to flee into Egypt to escape King Herod’s terrorism takes on new power and poignancy. That holy baby survived because someone helped his refugee family.

Jesus calls us to stand with the powerless, to speak for the voiceless, to protect the vulnerable, to feed the hungry, to comfort the bereaved. I call upon all Episcopalians to remember this in this season.

Those who do the work of refugee relief and resettlement are doing the work of angels. Let us support their message of "Fear not, for you are not alone." It is a message not only for refugees – Americans need to hear it as well.

That is our work -- the work of letting welcome overcome fear, love overcome hatred. And we enter into that work empowered and strengthened by the inexhaustible love of God.

I urge Episcopalians to find ways to help the refugees in your communities. Pray for them. And let your hands be the hands of Jesus. Let your smiles show the welcoming love of Jesus, your courage in the face of fear model the courage of Jesus, your quiet confidence that all will be well shine like that of Jesus.

For like Mary, like you and me, the refugees carry within themselves the image of God, a God waiting to be born again this Christmas.