

Religion

Refugee situation in Canada tragic

By JIM RYAN
2nd Sunday in Lent
Mark 9: 2-10
February 24, 1991
"We can't set up our tents without a Parks Canada Permit." The refugee situation in Canada? Not pleasant. Even if you can get here, you'll have to wait around.



Religion and Reality
by Jim Ryan

Two Refugee Stories from Tuesday, February 19:
1. The Globe and Mail, page four, above a one-third page ad for Royal Bank R.S.P. loans, printed a story, "Drowned man rejected at Border."

This is the story in full:
"A twenty-one year old Mexican man who drowned in the icy waters of the Niagara River late Saturday night while trying to cross to Canada in a rubber raft had been refused entry on February 14, Canadian immigration officials said yesterday.
A man from El Salvador, who was also tossed from the raft, swam to the Canadian shore at Queenston. Witnesses said the twenty-seven year old man's clothes were frozen from head to foot.

The Salvadoran was treated in hospital and later transferred to a refugee centre in Fort Erie. He is to be given another hearing on his application for refugee status.

Both men had been apprehended in the United States last week as illegal immigrants and were under orders to leave the U.S. within seven days."

2. The Toronto Star's lead editorial read, "Let refugees work and save money."

According to the Star, one quarter of all Metro refugee claimants have been in Canada over one year. (Refugees number about 23,400 in Metro, Peel,

Durham and York Regions.) The federal government will pay welfare costs for claimants up to a year. After that, local municipal governments are responsible. Peel Region has complained about this and sued the government to get its \$1.3 million welfare bill paid.

Ray Lazanik, general manager at Metro social services, blames Barbara MacDougall for turning motivated people into dependents and creating a backlash in the community against the able-bodied refugees who aren't working.

The Backlog
Barbara MacDougall's system is called the Backlog Clearance Programme. As of August 31, 1990, the total Backlog in Canada was 113,063. These are 113,063 people who have been waiting to have their refugee claims heard. Some have been waiting for over four years. They are not permitted to be joined by their families until their claims have been accepted.

A report commissioned by the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees has been sent to the United Nations Human Rights Committee complaining about the Backlog Programme and the physical, mental and social toll it takes upon people.

Ironically the UNHCR in Geneva, which will receive the ICCR's report entitled "Civil Rights and the Refugee Claimant Backlog", is the same international body that awarded the Nansen Medal to Canada in 1986. The award was given "in recognition of the major and sustained contribution made to the cause of refugees in their country and throughout the world over the years."

"This was the first time the Nansen medal had been awarded to an entire nation. It was a symbol of how important the plight of refugees had become to Canadians and, in turn, to government policy in the years since the early 1970's."

Bill C-55 and Bill C-84 passed by the Conservative government in the summer of 1988 and effective January 1, 1989, were designed to

streamline the system. Evidence suggests however that the delays are getting worse instead of better. Couple this with an increase in refugee claimants and you have a situation where refugees who are already suffering from the effects of natural disaster, torture and rape, now face a new terror, an implacable, sluggish bureaucracy.

As for the Gospel...
Mark asserts that there will be no glory without suffering. Christ must undergo the passion of Good Friday before he can be resurrected on Easter Sunday.

The promise Mark makes to his readers is that those who have been disfigured by suffering and torture will be transfigured with Christ in glory.

Endnote: Between War and Peace in Central America ed. Lisa North. Between the Lines, 1990. Refugee Update, Fall 1990. Issue No. 8.

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World Day of Prayer

By NANCY THOMPSON
St. Andrew's United Church
World Day of Prayer -
March 1, 1991

"On the Journey Together" is the theme of the 1991 World Day of Prayer service. The women of Kenya invite us to come on a journey, a safari, with them in their country. In preparing the service, the writers travelled many miles to hear the stories of women and to reflect with them on their faith journeys. They share with us their hopes and struggles.

As we gather on March 1, 1991, for the 104th World Day of Prayer service, we are invited to reflect on our own experiences and what it means for us, as Christians in Canada, to journey with our sisters and brothers in Kenya.

Each year the World Day of Prayer Service is written by women of a different country and distributed worldwide by the International Committee for the World Day of Prayer which has representatives from 170 coun-

tries. The International Committee had its quadrennial meeting in Jamaica in August 1990 to plan for the next four years and to select the themes and writer countries for the services.

In Canada, the World Day of Prayer is sponsored by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, a national council with representatives from eleven denominations. Local services are organized by ecumenical groups across the country. The offerings from the services are used to provide study and worship resources, to cover costs of printing and distributing the services, and to support ecumenical projects in Canada and abroad. Last year grants totalling \$40,554.00 were given to a variety of projects including education and skill development for low income women in Montreal, the set-up of an ecumenical centre in Czechoslovakia, and services to victims of wife abuse in Peru, Belize, Winnipeg and the eastern Arctic.

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