

# THIS IS THE FACE OF OUR BROTHER AND SISTER

**Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? It isn't me. This is our answer. I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me.**

**Today, Lord, we hear you asking, where are you? Who is your brother and sister? Let us pray for a change of heart.** ' Pope Francis

Joseph and Mary had two choices – stay and watch their son be murdered, or escape into Egypt. And how many families around the world are now facing the very same crisis and choice.



**Imagine if this were your son. What would you do?**

This is indeed the dilemma of many asylum seekers fleeing to Australia in hope of a new life. Just as Joseph and his family fled to a foreign country rather than face death, so too, parents today choose the danger of escape to try to find a new life for their families.

## OUR HISTORY – AS AUSTRALIANS, AND AS CHRISTIANS

All of us (except for the Indigenous people) are boat people or the descendants of those who have come from other countries. This past history has led us to take pride in our sense of adventure, our willingness to help out, our egalitarian attitudes, our belief in a fair go for all, our concern for the underdog, our love of land.

As Christians, we believe, as well, that we are called to love our neighbour, to regard every person as brother or sister, possessing the same rights we have to fullness of life.

Our history and our faith are really challenging us today. In the current climate of fear, many believe that we should be wary of those who are fleeing to our country. The situation raises many questions for us:

- How might it have been different for us if current policies had been in place for us or our ancestors?
- How would we feel if it were our family being rejected?
- How has our personal story influenced our attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees?
- How would it have been different for Joseph, Mary and their son, if Egypt in their time had enforced the current policies of the Government and Opposition?

### NAJEEBA'S STORY IS LIKE SO MANY OTHERS.

*“Leaving your country for good is one of the hardest decisions you can be forced to make. It means a break with all that you know – your family, your livelihood, your friends. All the familiar sights, sounds, smells and tastes...”*

*When she was young, many of Najeeba's relatives and friends were killed by the Taliban. With her parents, she fled the country. They were eventually crammed into a tiny fishing boat with 100 other people. Many days later, the Australian Navy finally escorted them to safety.*

*But Najeeba and her family were in for a shock. When they saw the barbed wire at Curtin processing Centre, they thought the Taliban had tricked them.*

*Life inside was tough. Finally, after months of uncertainty, the family was granted refugee status.*

*Now a student, Najeeba deeply appreciates the help she has received from concerned Australians: “many people have been like angels to us, full of caring and compassion.”*

Why then, have we now become so unwelcoming and fearful? Why have we allowed negative attitudes to grow, aggravated by the political rhetoric of both major Parties?

**Perhaps if the politicians did not see this as an election issue, perhaps if the media encouraged truth-telling rather than sensationalism and lies, perhaps if we learned the stories and met the people who have fled for their very lives, we would be better able to promote the reality of the situation among our own families and friends.**

*What do our current policies say about us as Australians and as Christians?* While this is a complex issue, the gospel is clearly challenging us. Many thinking and compassionate Australians argue that in the past few years, we have lost our way as a welcoming, generous nation. That we are not the country we were! That our individualism, our fear of increasing population, of being over-run, our preoccupation with law and order, betrays our Christian values.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TRUTHS?

1. 90% of boat people are found to be genuine refugees – people in real fear for their lives, people who have no other way of escaping their countries (because there is no queue there, and their only other option is torture and death).
2. Compared with other countries, and compared with the numbers of those we welcome as humanitarian refugees, the numbers of boat people are very small.
3. Australia hosts only 0.013% of the total global refugee population.
4. Numbers of boat people fleeing to Australia have increased, not because of Australian Government policy, but because of violence in countries from which they come.
5. Australia is in a sound position (with natural resources and the hard work of earlier refugees) to cope with those seeking our help.
6. Our mandatory detention policy is totally lacking in compassion - with many families and children traumatised by their experiences.

## WE WOULD BE SO MUCH POORER WITHOUT THEM

Refugees have enriched our country in ways that cannot be calculated. Even a glimpse of the lives of three of them tell something of this truth.

### SIR GUSTAV NOSSAL

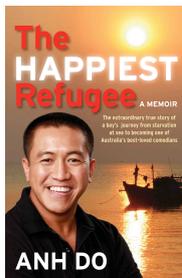


Sir Gustav Nossal came to Australia when he was seven and a half years old, his family escaping Nazi Austria because his father was a Jew.

Raised a Catholic because his mother was, he attended St Aloysius College in North Sydney. Later he attended the University of Sydney, where he studied medicine.

Throughout the world today, Gus is acknowledged as contributing to the health of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people. He has had a profound impact on Australian medical research, but his contributions to the health of the world's poor run much deeper. How much poorer would Australia and our world be if his family had not escaped Nazi Germany?

### ANH DO



Do and his family fled to Australia as refugees in 1980. In his 2010 autobiography, *The Happiest Refugee*, Do tells of how his family survived five days in a leaky fishing boat nine and a half

metres long and two metres wide and packed with 40 Vietnamese refugees fleeing across the ocean. "We were crammed in like sardines," he said.

*Anh* has appeared on many Australian TV shows such as *Thank God You're Here* and *Good News Week*, and was runner-up on *Dancing With The Stars* in 2007. He studied a combined Business Law degree at the University of Technology, Sydney.

He is brother of film director Khoa Do and has acted in several of Khoa's films, including *Footy Legends*, which he co-wrote and produced. In 2012, his TV show *Anh Does Vietnam* began airing.

### EVELYN IVY



Despite 12 long years in a refugee camp, and continuing uncertainty in her homeland of Liberia, Evelyn Ivy and her family have showed great courage and perseverance to begin a new life in Australia.

During seemingly endless years in a refugee camp in Guinea, Evelyn supported her five children, niece and two grandchildren by working as a seamstress and tailor for the Jesuit Refugee Services.

Today, Evelyn and her family have settled in Melbourne and are building a new life for themselves.

All four of Evelyn's daughters are now studying at school or taking English classes. Evelyn's son Allen has plans to pursue tertiary education, building on a one-year course in business management that he completed in Ivory Coast.

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

**TALK TO YOUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS** about the truth of the refugee situation.

**GET TO KNOW** refugee stories. **SUPPORT THE ACTIONS** of Church and community leaders who are working on major concerns.

**WRITE LETTERS to politicians who may respond to the challenge. Ask them to work for a policy that will:**

1. **treat** asylum seekers and refugees as human beings in need of compassion.
2. **promote** bi-partisan policy so that the asylum seeker question becomes a human rather than a political question.
3. **speed up** the processing of refugees
4. **build** a culture of support for the protection of refugees
5. **break** the link between the off-shore and the on-shore Protection Visa Program
6. **seek** a true regional solution, which is not simply a way for Australia to abdicate its responsibility for asylum seekers.

### RELEVANT WEBSITES

**Refugee Council of Australia**  
[www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

**National council of Churches**  
[www.ncca.org.au](http://www.ncca.org.au)

**Jesuit Refugee Services**  
[www.jrs.org.au](http://www.jrs.org.au)

**Amnesty International**  
[www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au)

**Dept of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**  
[www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)

**Congregational Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW**  
[www.clrinsw.org.au](http://www.clrinsw.org.au)

**Catholic Religious Australia**  
[www.cra.org.au](http://www.cra.org.au)

**Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Peace**  
[www.erc.org.au](http://www.erc.org.au)

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