

# Christians pray for refugees as Syrian civil war enters sixth year

March 15, 2016

WASHINGTON (RNS)—As the civil war in Syria entered its sixth year, Christians across the United States took to prayer.

On March 15, the fifth anniversary of the war, which has killed up to 470,000 people and displaced 7 million, the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and about a dozen other Christian groups raised awareness in American churches through the [#PrayForRefugees campaign](#).

"I fear that most people in our churches are paying little or no attention to this crisis," IMB President David Platt said.

The ecumenical coalition includes Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, World Relief, World Vision, Lutheran World Relief, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Catholic Relief Services, among others.

While there is great emphasis on Syria, the groups also call for fresh attention to the global surge in refugees, totaling 60 million worldwide. The [#PrayForRefugees campaign](#) began on Ash Wednesday and will conclude on Easter Sunday.

"While we may not all agree on the best political or logistical solution, any Christian can pray for peace in Syria, for protection and relief for those who are innocently caught in the crossfire, and for those serving the hurting," said Stephan Bauman, president of World Relief.

In Indianapolis, Roman Catholic Archbishop Joseph Tobin moved beyond prayer by welcoming a family of four Syrian refugees, despite Indiana Gov. Mike Pence's efforts to block federal funds to resettlement agencies.

On March 1, Federal Judge Tanya Walton Pratt ordered Indiana to fund refugee resettlement efforts, labeling the governor's ban unconstitutional discrimination. Indiana agencies may resettle another 200 refugees in Indiana this year. The state is expected to appeal the ruling.

Pence and 30 other governors have sought to ban resettlement of Syrian refugees, arguing the United States could be admitting terrorists by taking them in.

"The priests I talk to see the opportunity to lift up the refugee crisis as one of the core issues that Catholics focus on," said Christopher Hale, executive director of the Catholic Alliance for the Common Good and a former campaign aide to President Obama.

Yet admitting refugees is a hard sell in many pulpits. Last month, LifeWay Research released the findings of a survey of Protestant pastors headlined, "Churches twice as likely to fear refugees than to help them."

Few pastors had guided their churches to respond to refugees, the [survey](#) found. The majority of pastors—63 percent—had not discussed the refugee issue with their congregations.