**TO LOVE 2016 Easter Offering Resources**

Shared by Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director,

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TO LOVE Litany of Welcome:

Leader: We journey into this season of Lent remembering your call for Abraham and Sarah

to travel to a new land so all families of the earth may be blessed.

People: God, help us bless those who have sacrificed and braved dangers to find safety among

us.

Leader: We seek in this season to strengthen as a faith family in our love for others,

remembering your words to “do no wrong to the stranger,” and growing to accept one

another and ourselves.

People: God, strengthen us to be family for newcomers we encounter, welcoming them and

offering security and hope through our community, even as you have welcomed us.

Leader: We gather as one, united from lives that are diverse, and recalling how you asked us

to care for the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner.

People: God, encourage us to know that whenever we share hospitality with others, we find in

those relationships opportunities to more deeply see your face and do your will.

ALL: Lord of grace and love, call us anew in this time to give witness to your heart of

generosity. Surround us fully with your love as we worship, so that the joy of your

embrace might grow our confidence to open arms wide to the needs of your world.

TO LOVE the Other: A Story of Deep Disciples Welcome

It is human nature to hope that our actions TO LOVE have an enduring impact, and when our church’s actions are treasured, as well! Last December, as our nation grappled to understand that refugees are the most heavily screened of all entrants into the US, fear enveloped a number of states and national leaders who began to block refugees from arriving into their areas. When one Syrian refugee family was denied access into Indiana, they were re-routed and settled into Connecticut. A current staff member at The Brookings Institution wrote to the refugee agency that welcomed them to share his own grandparents’ story (told also in our April 26, 2007 edition of Disciples World Magazine):

The Rosenzweigs were a middle class Jewish family from Kassel, Germany, with parents who served as a factory manager and jeweler. When repression by the Nazis began in late 1938, the family quickly lost their jobs, were evicted from their apartment, were forbidden to any longer attend public school, and experienced the destruction of their synagogue and burning of the Torah. Fleeing Germany months later, the parents and young teenage daughter came eventually to New York, and were later transferred to a refugee resettlement hostel run by the American Friends Service committee in West Branch, Iowa. It was here that members of the Christian Church in Eureka, Illinois--choosing to go beyond reading newspaper headlines and prayer--drove to the hostel in Scattergood School, interviewed the daughter, and offered to welcome her family into a fully furnished apartment in their community that had rarely known Jews; let alone German-born Jews.

From their loving welcome, that young refugee girl learned acceptance, the meaning of community, and how people with differences can live together in peace. Both parents found employment in Eureka--and the girl, Irmgard Wessel, eventually graduated *summa cum laude* from Eureka College. “That young girl was my mother,” wrote the Brookings Institution staffer in his letter sent to Connecticut just months ago. “She never forgot the fear and desperation of being refugee and a new immigrant…and she became a lifelong advocate for others.”

TO LOVE and to welcome are to model our God who, “being rich in mercy,…made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5). May God, who calls us to “love one another” continue to be made manifest in our welcome for refugees, immigrants, and all who are vulnerable among us.

(Shared by Eureka Christian Church with Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries. Please contact [sstanley@dhm.disciples.org](mailto:sstanley@dhm.disciples.org) to learn more about how you can continue our Disciples “heritage of hospitality” by building relationships with refugees today!)

TO LOVE As All Enter and Leave:

Recently, First Christian Church, Rockville, Maryland engaged in a historical ritual of welcome, called a “Door Blessing,” as a part of a worship services focusing upon welcoming refugees. Although the custom’s roots are often linked with Epiphany, this custom demonstrates well how the gift of Jesus on the cross leads us into a new life of hospitality that seeks to consistently transform the character and depth of our “walk in faith.” The life of Jesus--who was eager to eat with sinners, heal the blind, seek the lost, and ultimately walk towards the cross--challenges us to WELCOME ALL who enter into our doorways. Jesus’ life calls us to invite those in need to find the doorways of our homes and congregations, and to seek to serve the vulnerable anew each time we walk through the doorways of our homes and into the world of our Risen Lord.

Consider touching or writing on the door of your home or church, and offering this prayer, adapted from Worshiping With Children, on the day of your Easter Offering:

*God of doors and homes, bless this home* (or church) *this season and every season.*

*Bless all who come and go through this door, both those who live here and those who visit.*

*May all who enter through this door come in peace and bring joy.*

*May all who come to this door find welcome and love.*

*May all who exit this door share hospitality and hope.*

*May the love and joy in this home* (or church) *overflow and spread into the community and*

*offer comfort to the world.*

(You may find the prayer and see additional information on the custom of “Door Blessing” at: <http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2013/11/year-epiphany-monday-january-6-2014-or.html><http://liturgy.co.nz/epiphany-chalk-house-blessing-2>.)