



**“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” —Matthew 25:35**

Each year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees designates June 20 as World Refugee Day—an opportunity to honor and celebrate the refugees in our midst. As the U.S. Lutheran churches’ expression of welcome to newcomers, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service encourages congregations of all denominations to set aside the Sunday closest to June 20 to remember and pray for refugees around the world and in your communities. In partnership with local agencies, congregations and volunteers, LIRS carries out the work of resettling refugees and helping them become self-sufficient in communities across America.

**One Refugee’s Story of Hope**

My name is Angelos Agok. I am from southern Sudan. In 1986 I sought a government scholarship for university studies. The scholarship came with a condition—two years of compulsory military service. The military training was based on Islamic teachings of jihad—holy war. When we requested a program for non-Muslim students, some of us were arrested and beaten.

After a month I was released and fled to my hometown, but I was apprehended again and spent six months in harsh military detention. After I was released I had to report to the base each day along with 40–50 others. On September 12, 1987, soldiers opened fire on us. I ran until no one was behind me anym

I met resistance fighters who confirmed my story and helped me. I joined them and fought with them. After 12 years of struggle, I became a refugee.

In July 2000 I came to the United States. I consider myself blessed abundantly because I am one of few who survived. Despite the calamities I had gone through, I persevered through faith and hope, and I now know the joy of restored life and dignity. On September 27, 2007, I took my oath to become a U.S. citizen. I am grateful to LIRS for the services, support, counseling and other good work that makes it possible for refugees to achieve our dreams.



*Angelos Agok helps bring hope and joy to others as he serves with LIRS in Baltimore. He also remains active in the Washington, D.C., Sudanese community.*

**A Prayer for World Refugee Day**

Gracious God, your Son knew what it was to wander this earth not knowing where he would lay his head. In your compassion, embrace those today who have had to flee home and country. Accompany them as they seek new soil in which to plant their roots. Give them safe passage so that at journey’s end they can lay down to rest in peace. And use our hands to help them, our hearts to care and our minds to learn how we can more faithfully love the stranger in our midst. In the name of Jesus, who calls us to welcome the stranger, amen.

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