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## Bishop Dunlop's Message on Terrorism and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

### *And who is my neighbor?*

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

<sup>26</sup> He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' <sup>27</sup> He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

**-Luke 10:25-29**

Christians know well that our Lord commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, but in the face of the Syrian refugee crisis, many are asking, as did the lawyer in Luke 10, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answers the lawyer's question with the story of the traveler who is robbed, beaten and left by the road to die. All seems hopeless after two religious people pass him by, but then the "Good Samaritan" stops to help.

We are called to be neighbor to people in need, especially people who are victims and are in desperate circumstances. So it is right for us to ask, "And who is my neighbor?"

In recent weeks our news outlets have shown us the grave images of terrorism in France that has rocked Paris and put Europe on high alert. Certainly we are neighbors to the French, as well as to our European brothers and sisters who mourn their dead and strive to keep their children safe.

But the news also gives us heart-rending images of refugee families pouring out of Syria, fleeing for safety and a better life. Though the Syrian crisis is complicated, it's easy to understand that refugees and their families are simply escaping war and horrific violence that has devastated their homeland.

As these refugees seek new permanent homes, many Europeans and Americans are understandably wary. They fear that terrorists and violence will accompany the refugees into their own homelands. In the face of these concerns, we need to be prayerful and thoughtful, not letting emotion and fear overpower us, but rather paying attention to the facts:

- Welcoming refugees is a time-honored tradition of the United States, as evidenced by the inscription on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

- The refugees streaming out of Syria are themselves the victims of terrorism and violent religious extremism. They are fleeing those perils.
- Homeland security remains the top priority of the governments of the United States and our European allies. They will do all they can to foil terrorism, bring terrorists to justice and keep their people safe, even as they work to settle innocent Syrian refugees.
- Over its many decades of welcoming refugees, the United States has refined its system of handpicking those who resettle here. Refugees undergo many screenings involving multiple federal defense and intelligence agencies. This thorough vetting takes up to two years.
- Refugees who have been settled in the United States have come from all corners of the globe and have represented people of all races, nationalities and religions. As a nation of diverse, free people, we know we are strongest when we respect and celebrate the differences among us. Over the years, waves of refugees have assimilated into our culture to become productive citizens who cherish our values of tolerance, freedom and charity.

Lutherans understand intimately the struggles of refugees and the challenges of resettling them. Over the last 70 years, our Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has helped thousands of families restart their lives and find safety, prosperity and freedom in the United States. It's something Lutherans do, and we are proud of LIRS's work. (For information about the Syrian refugee crisis and how you can help, go to [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org).)

Amid this, we are not naïve. We know that the refugee crisis will not be solved quickly or easily, and that we may also witness more terrorist acts. But as scary as terrorism can be, it's important that we not be blinded by our fear, but rather empowered by our love for our God and for our neighbors.

In Luke 10, Jesus answers the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?" with the story of the Good Samaritan who helped the robbery victim after two religious people passed him by. Then it is Jesus's turn to ask a question:

*<sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' <sup>37</sup>He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'*

As we seek to love our Syrian refugee neighbors, let us remember Jesus's command: "Go and do likewise."

Peace,



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