

## Fasting Like a Refugee: A Lenten Call to Solidarity

Tashia Toupin, Social Justice Co-ordinator, Archdiocese of Regina



The season of Lent is a gift we give ourselves amidst the chaos of our busy lives. It is a time to slow down and focus on what is most important. This is the gift of Sabbath so that we can reflect on how we are living out lives of holiness or not. We are called to take time out of our day to fast, pray, give alms, and meditate on our relationship with God, our neighbour, creation, and ourselves.

This year, you are invited to pray, fast, and give alms with acts of solidarity for the 117.2 million refugees worldwide. Your prayer is, of course, your own, but we will also send out these weekly reflections. Everyone is encouraged to fast by eating like a Syrian refugee in a refugee camp in Jordan. The suggestion for almsgiving is to compare your monthly food bills to what you spend “eating like a refugee” and donate the difference.

<b>Food for One Person for One Week</b>	
2 3/4 cups of rice	1 cup dry lentils
1/2 cup dried chickpeas	1 can of tinned sardines (small)
400 grams kidney beans (540 ml can)	1 1/3 cups vegetable oil

I see this list and cringe at the thought of no coffee, garlic, vegetables, or cheese. They do not get to say, “I don’t like sardines. Can I have summer sausage instead?” I will try my best to dive into this experience. No meals out, no nighttime tea with honey, no fruit or vegetables. I am not even going to put soy sauce on my rice. I will have a cup of black coffee each morning, but I will try to hold this fast, even on Sundays. Refugees do not get a mini-Easter reprieve. I encourage you to engage in this as much as you can. Make accommodations as you need, as is always the case with your Lenten fasting. However, take this opportunity to reflect on how little agency and power is afforded these people. If you are diabetic or have allergies and are a refugee, there is not much wiggle room. Whatever choices you make for Lent, be safe.

Each week there will be a weekly Lenten reflection based on the Sunday readings posted to our Facebook page and linked to our website. Maybe your parish wants to print a few off, and you can share them as a small group after Mass at coffee. These could serve as journaling entries or as a conversation at supper. Use these reflections privately, in your classroom, lunchroom, or wherever works best for you. Please share and encourage others to participate. Our Lenten readings and reflections focus on the themes of communal and original sin, leaving home, relying on others' hospitality, water, the moralizing of poverty/suffering, and new life. You will also have the chance to hear some first-hand experiences of Canadians who were refugees.

For your almsgiving, you are encouraged to donate the difference between what you normally spend on food, eating out, beverages, alcohol, snacks, gum, etc., from the cost of eating like a refugee. There are many great places for you to donate that money. If you want to help directly with refugees, there are a few options:

- The Archdiocese of Regina Annual Appeal. In the memo state that this is a donation for "refugee." We help sponsor and support around 50-70 refugees each year and are working hard to expand that number. Your donations would greatly help.
- Your Parish's social justice committee if they are interested in sponsoring a refugee. For more information, contact Tashia Toupin.
- You could also donate to your local "Newcomer Welcome Centre." Just Google that phrase and the name of your city/town and it will show up.
- In Regina, the Immigrant Women's Centre <https://reginaiwc.ca/> supports language classes and learning for all or newcomers.
- Also in Regina the Open Door Society <https://rods.sk.ca/> helps provides so many supports for Newcomers, homework help, interpretation, computer classes, writing and job skills training.
- Any of your public Libraries help support Refugees and Newcomers too.
- If you would like to support a proactive NGO donate to Development and Peace-Caritas Canada (DPCC) on the fifth week of Lent for Solidarity Sunday. DPCC helps create durable solutions for people in their countries so they can solve the problems that create refugees in the first place.

One last thing, you may want to consider purchasing your food from an ethnic store in town that is owned and operated by Newcomers. They need your support, and you might be able to share a bit of your story and hear theirs too. Happy Lent, everyone!

If you have questions or comments or want to learn more about how you, your parish, or your workplace could help support refugees, contact Tashia Toupin at 306-352-1651, [ttoupin@archregina.sk.ca](mailto:ttoupin@archregina.sk.ca)