

Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman  
Congregation Shaarei Shamayim  
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## **Open the Borders to Syrian Refugees**

### **Wisconsin Clergy Press Conference**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious, compassionate God, open our hearts to every beloved human being who walks this earth.

Open our hearts to weary, desperate refugees who are fleeing war and bloodshed and unspeakable violence in Syria. Who risk their lives in the hopes that they, or at least their children, will survive. Who yearn for shelter and for safety.

Open our hearts to the Syrian refugees who grasp the hands of their terrified children, children who do not understand the grim reality of a closed border, who do not understand why politicians could harden their hearts and turn them away.

Gracious, compassionate God, help us to remember that every human being is created in your image, that every Syrian child is just as precious and holy as our own.

Help us to realize that we stand at a fateful moment in history.

Let us stand on the right side of justice. Let us hear the cries of the oppressed. Let us raise our voices and demand that our borders be opened. Let us open our arms with kindness and respect. Let us fight the xenophobia and racism that grows daily in our great state of Wisconsin.

*V'yigal ka-mayim mishpat utzdakah k'nachal eytan.*

Let justice roll down like the waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

And let us say, Amen.

#### **Statement**

Opening our borders to Syrian refugees is a moral obligation.

In the Jewish tradition, the Torah calls on us no less than 36 times not only to welcome, but to love the stranger.

Jewish tradition calls on us to open our borders and to welcome these refugees in, to love them as our own, to care for them, and to protect them.

Our politicians tell us that we have to choose between our ideals and our national security. That is a false choice. Refugees are already the most thoroughly vetted and screened people who enter the United States. Since 9/11 the United States has taken in 750,000 refugees and not one has been charged with terrorist activity.

The Jewish community in which I serve is particularly sensitive to this issue. We remember 75 years ago when Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis desperately sought a safe haven in this country. Elected officials argued that Nazi infiltrators would intermingle with the refugees. They spoke out against opening the borders to so many Jews. They stirred up hatred that led to so many acts of antisemitism.

These ugly excuses for not welcoming in refugees, fleeing from the horrors of war and violence, had real consequences. My great-grandparents were lucky enough to immigrate to the United States before the doors were shut, but so many of their relatives could not get out. They died at the hands of the Nazi regime.

We all have these stories in the Jewish community – shut borders, closed doors, entry denied.

Then it was Jews. Now it is Muslims.

It is incumbent upon us to make different decisions this time.

To refuse to welcome the stranger is a cowardly act. It tramples on our shared obligation to honor the spark of God in every human being.

Now is precisely the time to stand up for our ideals, our values, and our deepest beliefs.

We cannot stand idly by. We cannot remain silent.