

Restore us, oh God



First Sunday of Advent

Psalm 80 is an expression of deep faith and hope, and it points towards a peaceful future; for the return of a life that once was.

As people living in Australia, it is often hard to relate to this experience of the Israelites. Most of us have never been in a position where danger has forced us to flee our homes and where we've had to endure harsh conditions in a foreign land with no end in sight.

Yet sadly, this is a very current and real experience for many people around the world today; people like Amba who lived with her husband and their two sons in the Congo.

"I remember the day I left my home. Shooting and killing had come to my town. When the fighters came my husband, Lisembé, was shot in the leg. We fled straight away, taking whatever transport was available to move from town to town, seeking safety."

Amba and her family now live as refugees, in Ethiopia. While life there is safe, they still face many hardships.

"We are restricted in what we can do. We can't find work and school fees are high, so it is hard to make ends meet and provide for our family. Lisembé was a taxi driver in the Congo, but he can't drive with his bad leg."

However, your gifts to the Christmas Bowl have given Amba and her family hope. Through Act for Peace's partner in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), Amba is currently taking a computer course

and learning skills that will help her to provide for her family. She told us:

"The course is very helpful for me – both physically and mentally. When we arrived here, we knew no one, and it can be very isolating. Now I am meeting other women like me and we support each other. It is giving me something positive in my life."

Sadly Amba's story is one of many. In fact, today more than 65 million people are displaced from their homes after escaping conflict or disasters. That's more people than at any time since WWII and in the history of the Christmas Bowl. Many refugees share the Israelites longing to be restored.

The Psalmists recurring plea "restore us" can be translated more literally as "cause us to return." This Hebrew word has been used throughout the Old Testament to describe God bringing people back from exile (1 Kings 8:34; Jer 27:22 and Daniel 9:25). Most refugees have the same cry – they, like the Israelites, simply want to return home.

Your support through the Christmas Bowl is one way of sharing the hope and love of God – and of participating in God's work of bringing about peace in the world today. Your financial gifts and ongoing prayerful support of the staff, partners, and people who Act for Peace serves will help restore those who have lost everything. That is one of the most meaningful gifts we can give this Christmas.

Training for refugees

Ethiopia currently hosts the fifth highest number of refugees in the world, with the latest UNHCR recorded figure showing close to 800,000.

Through courses such as computer and hair-dressing training, refugees have the opportunity to learn new skills, build their self-esteem and strengthen their financial independence.



\$180

Training for life

\$180 can provide basic computer skills training for refugees in Ethiopia.