



WELCOME THE STRANGER

A CANADIAN CHURCH GUIDE TO
WELCOMING REFUGEES

Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders
(SAH) Working Group

A partnership of

 **EFC** The Evangelical
Fellowship of Canada

Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) Working Group

A partnership of



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FREEDOM**



**SANCTITY
OF LIFE**



**CHURCH &
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Introduction


The Syrian refugee crisis awakened new generations to the plight and reality of refugees forced to flee their homelands. The disturbing images that flooded media outlets, especially in 2015, unleashed a wave of compassion and concern.

The Canadian Church stepped up in record numbers to participate in private sponsorship in partnership with the Canadian government and to help government-sponsored refugees feel more comfortable in their new Canadian home.

For some churches, refugee sponsorship is a new ministry calling, and they have stepped out in faith for the first time to answer God's call to welcome the stranger. There are also denominations and churches across Canada who have sponsored refugees for decades and draw on a wealth of experience as they continue this gospel work.

In *Welcome the Stranger* you will find the stories of both veteran church groups and first-time sponsors as they share some of the lessons they have learned. You'll gain a better understanding of the process of sponsoring refugees, including the responsibilities and the hard work involved, but also the great rewards. There are discussion questions to help you and your friends, neighbours, small group or perhaps your entire church discern your path ahead in refugee sponsorship.

This booklet is the collaborative effort of the Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders Working Group, a partnership facilitated by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and comprised of sponsorship representatives from its affiliate denominations and ministries. Several Working Group members serve on the council of the Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association and regularly liaise with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. This unique Working Group meets regularly under the banner of our Christian faith. They problem solve, strategize and encourage each other and all Canadians to engage in sponsorship and support of vulnerable refugees worldwide.



In the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, the Canadian Church stepped up in record numbers to participate in refugee sponsorship.



1



A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Why should Christians and the Christian community sponsor refugees?

By Roy Berkenbosch

All refugees are made in God's image, regardless of their place of origin, ethnicity, religious tradition or any other human demarcation. All are loved by a compassionate God. God's desire for them and every other human is that they would flourish. Every man, woman and child is known by, called and beloved of God.

These simple but profound theological truths compel us to spend time, money, energy and any other resource available to help those who have been marginalized, abused, denied human rights and deprived of home and citizenship, to help them establish themselves in a place of safety and security where a flourishing future is possible. We who have been given much are called to bless those who need our resources and, for a time, need us.

Our example

Jesus was a refugee. Shortly after His birth, Jesus and His parents fled an abusive and tyrannical government prepared to practise genocide to preserve power (Matthew 2:13-15). Jesus, especially in the Gospel of Matthew, represents the experience of Israel, and His exile to Egypt is part of that journey. Yes, Jesus stands in solidarity with all humans, but in a special way He stands with and has compassion for refugees. It is one way that Jesus is "fully human in every way" (Hebrews 2:17).

Jesus reminds us much of the experience of the Old Testament people of God was as a people marginalized, alienated, vulnerable and subject to the tyrannical powers of their age. Abraham was called to leave his homeland. Jacob left home in fear of Esau's revenge. Israel sojourned in Egypt, wandered in the wilderness and then underwent a horrendous deportation and exile. King David lived much of his life on the run, as did the prophets.

God's people have a history of being forced to live on the move,

All refugees are made in God's image, regardless of their place of origin, ethnicity, religious tradition or any other human demarcation.

Jesus not only shares in the experience of refugees and others who suffer on the margins, but He defines His ministry and priorities in relation to their release.

forsaking the comforts and securities of home, regularly denied a settled life, forced to rely on the mercies of God. Those mercies are very often expressed through the compassion of others.

Jesus consistently lives out solidarity with poor and marginalized people throughout the Gospels. Jesus not only shares in the experience of refugees and others who suffer on the margins, but He defines His ministry and priorities in relation to their release. Jesus wants captives set free, hungry people to be fed, prisoners to be visited. In Luke's Gospel (4:16-19), Jesus begins His ministry with a riveting interpretation of Isaiah 61, declaring that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him, anointing Him to proclaim liberty to the captives and good news to the poor. Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus fulfils the prophetic words of Mary in Luke 1, namely that He would raise up those who are downtrodden and fill up the lives of those who are deprived.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about the judgment of the nations and reveals that the criteria for judgment is compassionate service to those in need: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." That service can include the provision of food and water, clothing, a visit, an intervention, a home and shelter, an identity card or a new beginning.

More ominously, whatever has not been done for "the least of these" has not been done for Jesus. Whether Jesus has in mind His followers specifically, or anyone else in need, He makes clear He is hidden among the poor and disenfranchised. His identification with them could not be clearer, nor could His summons to loving, compassionate action be any more straightforward. Why would we resist?

Our calling

Why sponsor refugees? There are so many reasons. We are called, as individuals and as church communities, to be compassionate as God is compassionate. We are exhorted to treat others as we would have them treat us. We are told the perfect sacrifice God desires is simply that we do "act justly and ... love mercy and ... walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

We are called to love our neighbour as ourselves. And if we ever stumble over the definition of neighbour, wondering if there is some exemption clause for a neighbor we may not like or who makes us uncomfortable, we need only remind ourselves of the parable of the Good Samaritan. That traveler was commended



precisely because he gave no thought to whether the miserable wretch on the side of the road was desirable or undesirable, worthy or unworthy, like him or unlike him. He simply responded in compassion. The Church is called to do the same.

Scripture repeatedly exhorts God’s people to “love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19). Loving our neighbour, whether they are near or far, Jesus says and shows, is the fulfilment of the law.

Any real encounter with the gospel quickly becomes a summons to a life of radical love of God and neighbour. Although these two loves are distinct, they are in the end not so different after all, for no one can love God while despising a neighbour. Churches cannot open the door to God and fail to open the door to the refugee. To ask, “Why should I love a refugee?” is like asking, “Why should I love God?”

Partners in the Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders Working Group (facilitated by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada with members across Canada from various denominations and organizations) believe that sponsoring refugees is a tangible and immediate way of expressing love for God and love for neighbours. Individually as Christians and collectively as Christian communities, we put our faith into actions that can change lives, of both refugees and those who sponsor them. I myself have experienced the joy of welcoming refugees into our faith family – it is both a pleasure and a gift for which I am immensely grateful.

Why should we sponsor refugees? Why, in heaven’s name, would we not?

Roy Berkenbosch is an advisor to World Renew and The Micah Centre at The King’s University, Edmonton.

Any real encounter with the gospel quickly becomes a summons to a life of radical love of God and neighbour.



2

GLOSSARY

Explaining the terms

Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program

A program in which a refugee referred for resettlement by the UN Refugee Agency is sponsored by both the Government of Canada and private sponsors. The Government and the private sponsor each commit to financially support the refugee for six months and the private sponsor commits to one year of social and emotional support.

Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR)

A refugee referred to Canada by the United Nations Refugee Agency, brought to Canada and supported by the Government of Canada or of Quebec for 12 months.

Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program

A program developed in Canada where private citizens commit to providing financial, emotional and resettlement support to refugees, for a minimum of 12 months after their arrival in Canada.

Refugee Claimant/Asylum Seeker (in Canada)

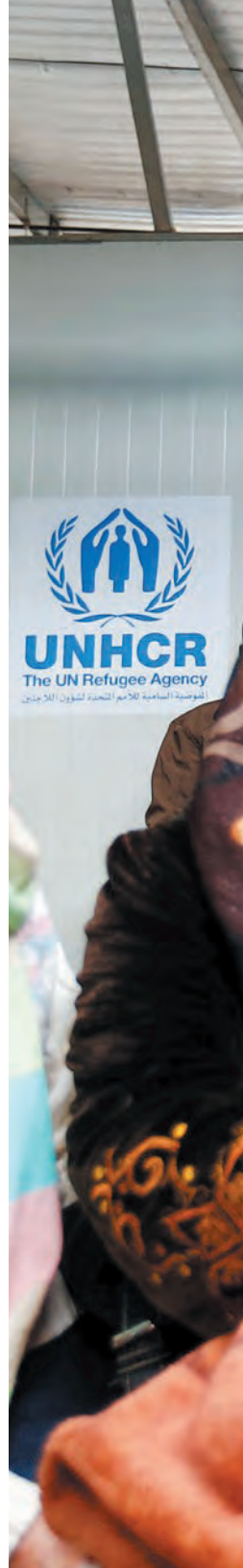
A person who applies for protection as a refugee from within Canada or at a port of entry because they fear persecution or would be in danger if they returned home.

Refugee Settlement Agencies

Agencies that provide settlement services and support for newcomers to Canada. Privately sponsored refugees, refugee claimants, and sponsorship agreement holders all access these services.

Sponsorship Agreement Holders

Canadian-based groups that have signed agreements with the Federal Government to sponsor refugees to come to Canada. Most SAHs are religious, ethnic, community or humanitarian organizations, and include evangelical denominations and ministries.



Refugee

A person who has been forced to flee their country. Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (1951 *UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*).

INFOGRAPHICS

World refugee resettlement



40%

of forcibly displaced persons were under the age of 18

Less than 0.3%

of the world's refugees are ever resettled

14%

drop in the number of refugees resettled worldwide between 2018 and 2019

(UNHCR, JULY 2019)

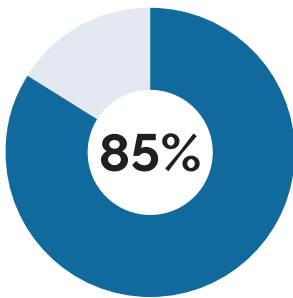


26

countries around the world accepted refugees for resettlement in 2019
(UNHCR GLOBAL TRENDS, 2019)

26.0
MILLION

Number of refugees in the world
(UNHCR, JUNE 2020)



Number of the world's refugees hosted by developing countries



Vulnerability categories include:

- WOMEN & GIRLS AT RISK
- SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AND/OR TORTURE
- SEPARATED FAMILY
- MEDICAL NEEDS
- CHILDREN AT RISK

Top host countries

Turkey
3.6
MILLION

Pakistan
1.4
MILLION

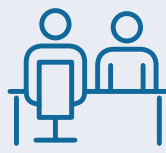
Uganda
1.4
MILLION



HOW ARE REFUGEES IDENTIFIED FOR RESETTLEMENT IN CANADA?



Only recognized refugees whose **life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental rights are at risk** in the host country are considered for resettlement.



UNHCR identifies vulnerable cases to be referred to resettlement countries. **Refugees themselves cannot apply for resettlement.** However, Canada is the only country that allows its private citizens to refer specifically-named applicants for sponsorship.



UNHCR refers only the most vulnerable cases – refugees whose lives are in danger in their current host country – to be considered for resettlement. **Refugees do not pick their country of resettlement.**



Persons found to have committed serious crimes or who might pose a threat to others **would not be referred** for resettlement in another country.

PHOTOS: (PREVIOUS SPREADS AND THIS PAGE) REUTERS

Sources: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>; <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada.html> (accessed February 28, 2020); UNHCR Global Trends 2019, published June 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>

INFOGRAPHICS

Canadian refugee resettlement



700,000

refugees have been resettled in Canada since 1959

#2

Canada has an exceptional history of welcoming refugees and is the second largest resettlement country in the world

Canada has three different refugee resettlement programs

GOVERNMENT ASSISTED (GAR)

Refugee referred by **UNHCR**

Financial assistance **From the Federal Government for one year**

PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP (PSR)

Refugee referred by **A private sponsor**

Financial assistance **From the sponsor for the first year**

BLENDED VISA OFFICE-REFERRED (BVOR)

Refugee referred by **UNHCR**

Financial assistance **Six months from private sponsors, six months from the Federal Government**

Programs used in 2018

29%

67%

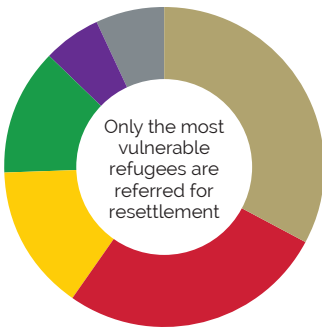
4%



After refugees are referred for resettlement by UNHCR or private sponsors, Canadian Visa Officers screen them for potential medical, criminal and security concerns, and assess whether they are in need of resettlement. Upon arrival, resettled refugees become Canadian permanent residents.



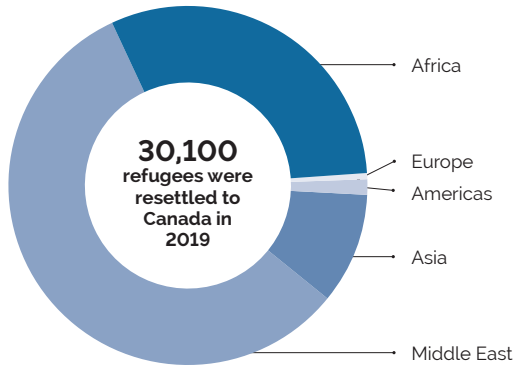
Refugee resettlement referrals to Canada from UNHCR by vulnerability category (2018)



Only the most vulnerable refugees are referred for resettlement

- Legal/physical protection
- Survivors of torture/violence
- Women at risk
- Lack of alternate solutions
- Medical needs
- Other

Refugee resettlement to Canada by region of origin (2018)



30,100
refugees were
resettled to
Canada in
2019

48%
FEMALE

52%
MALE

61%
ADULTS

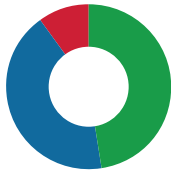
39%
MINORS

Sources: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program.html>; <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/refugee-protection/resettlement.html>; <https://www.unhcr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/refugee-resettlement-facts.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2020); UNHCR Global Trends 2019, published June 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>

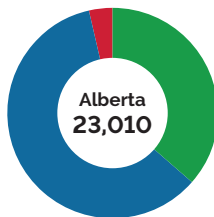
MAP

Resettled refugees by province/territory and immigration category

January 2015 – June 2020



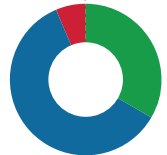
British Columbia
12,900



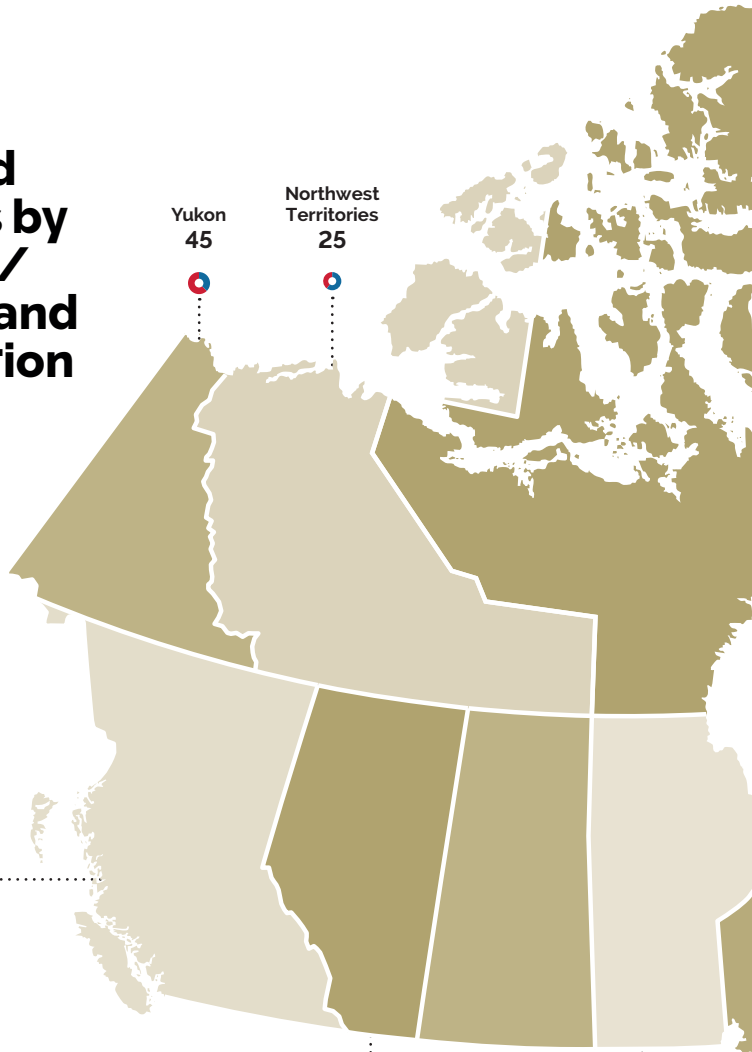
Alberta
23,010



Saskatchewan
5,900



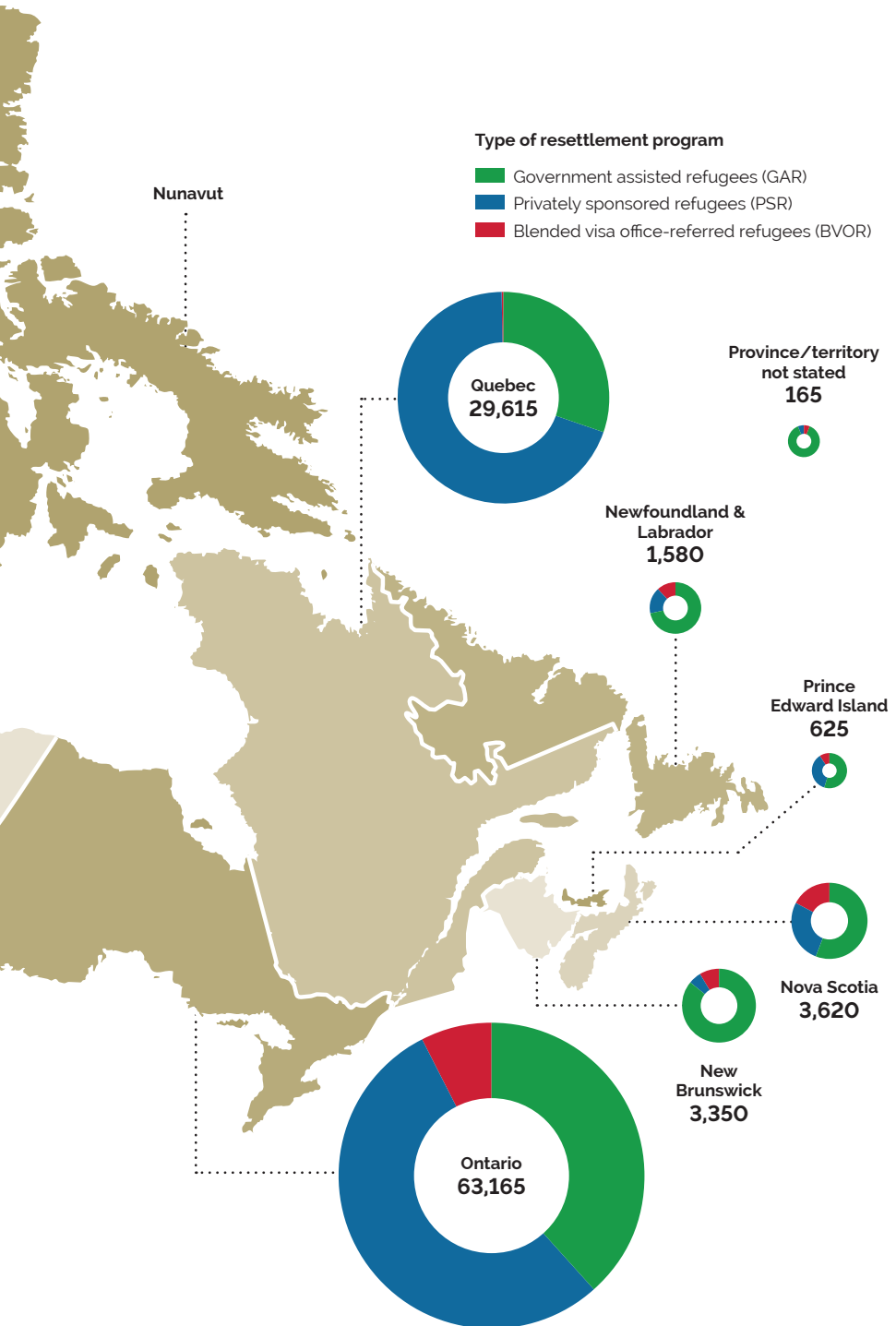
Manitoba
10,820



Data source: 'Resettled Refugees - Monthly IRCC Updates', Government of Canada: Open Government, Data set: Canada - Admissions of Resettled Refugees by Province/Territory and Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Intended Destination and Immigration Category, January 2015 - June 2020, accessed Sept 4, 2020, at <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/4a1b260a-7ac4-4985-80a0-603bfe4aec11>

Type of resettlement program

- Government assisted refugees (GAR)
- Privately sponsored refugees (PSR)
- Blended visa office-referred refugees (BVOR)



INFOGRAPHICS

How refugees benefit Canada

Sponsorship isn't just a one-way relationship. Data shows that refugees contribute to Canadian life.



Contributions



Use of social services

OVER A PERIOD OF 20 YEARS, REFUGEES CONTRIBUTE MORE IN INCOME TAX THAN THEY RECEIVE IN PUBLIC BENEFITS AND SERVICES.



ALMOST HALF OF ALL REFUGEES IN CANADA LIVE IN SMALLER CITIES AND TOWNS.

2 of 3

refugees in Canada become homeowners after ten years, putting down roots in Canadian communities.



14.4%

of settled refugees are self-employed or business owners. Refugees are typically highly motivated, innovative and entrepreneurial, creating jobs for themselves and others.



Refugees often come to Canada early in their lives, which means they have many years to work and contribute to Canada's economy. The reality of this young demographic can mitigate some of the challenges of Canada's overall aging demographic, lessen the decline of Canada's worker-to-retiree ratio, and fill labour gaps - while enhancing productivity.



Refugees bring an impressive range of experience to Canada. They are doctors, farmers, engineers, scientists, etc. Even if they are not working in their field of expertise, when settling into their new lives they still manage to spark new and innovative ideas, and solve problems that impact us all.



Diversity makes our whole country smarter, more creative and harder-working. Diverse societies tend to thrive, economically and culturally.

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CITIZENSHIP

Refugees have the highest rate of citizenship (89 per cent) of all immigration categories (the other categories are economic, family-sponsored and other immigrants), clearly demonstrating their love and commitment for Canada.



CULTURE

Multiculturalism in our communities contributes to diversity in music, food and art.



Canada's global standing is enhanced as our country's reputation of humanitarian acceptance demonstrates compassion and leadership.



INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Refugees help forge international trade ties thanks to their expertise, linguistic skills and personal connections with their country of origin. Studies show that Canada's trade relations are greater with those nations that have provided large numbers of immigrants.



Children of refugee families perform as well in school as Canadian-born children, and their knowledge and skills contribute greatly to Canada's workforce.



Refugees are survivors and have already demonstrated courage, determination and resilience in escaping persecution. They continue to draw on these virtues and skills as they rebuild their lives in Canada.

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3



A CHURCH'S STORY

Coming together as churches

By Karen Stiller

Near the end of October 2015 my husband and I began to read accounts of Canadian churches stepping up to sponsor Syrian refugees who had fled their war-torn homeland. The churches we read about were large and small, urban and rural, and coast to coast. My husband was a pastor of a church in Port Perry, Ont., at that time.

“Why couldn’t we do that?” we asked each other. And that was the beginning of a journey that grew to include five Port Perry churches, dozens of volunteers and the eventual arrival of four Syrian families with their children into our small town.

Initially we held two community-wide information evenings at our church, where we publicly presented the idea and explored whether there was a will to take on this project. Having just completed a renovation of our building, we didn’t think our church alone could handle the financial responsibilities of sponsoring a family. Plus, we thought it would be a great community-wide project, to draw in other churches and also people who didn’t attend churches at all who may not have the opportunity otherwise to participate in a large, organized movement to bring refugee families to Canada. It worked.

At that first meeting, our church was packed. We talked about sponsoring one family. “Why not two?” a young mother asked from the audience. And we were off.

We welcomed a speaker from a government agency that helps citizens with refugee work, and she briefed us on what we could expect and the work ahead of us. The paperwork was formidable, and we quickly realized we needed the right people in the right positions. We divided into teams, and each team had a lead. We had an overall steering committee that kept our train on the track.

We hosted fundraising dinners and events like an art show where local artists created work on the theme of refuge which we sold and auctioned off. We had donation boxes placed around town, with graphic artists donating their time and skill to make things look great. We even had a birdhouse auction, where artists painted

We thought it would be a great community-wide project, to draw in other churches and also people who didn’t attend churches at all.

donated wooden birdhouses and then people bid on them. A local art gallery provided the venue.

Our relationship with the Sponsorship Agreement Holder that took on our group, now known as the Port Perry Refugee Support Group, was invaluable. They were coach and guide, answering our multiple questions and reassuring us that it would all work out. And it did. The first family arrived in December 2016 with three more families to follow.

This might be the single most difficult part of sponsoring a family: remembering they are autonomous individuals.

With each subsequent family, the teams grew in confidence and ability. I think we had made some rookie mistakes at the beginning, including possibly exhibiting a kind of “father knows best” instinct toward the family, which I believe is common. We want the families we sponsor to thrive, and we think we know the best way to make that happen. This might be the single most difficult part of sponsoring a family: remembering they are autonomous individuals who might have had very successful careers and beautiful lives that they did not want to leave in their home country.

Sponsoring and then walking with refugee families during their first all-important 12 months in Canada is not easy, but it is one of the most worthwhile things you and your church will ever do.

Karen Stiller is a senior editor of *Faith Today*, Canada's Christian magazine.

A REFUGEE'S STORY

Noori

"Everything for us was unfamiliar. It was like a dream. Especially for my wife, it was the first time she had lived anywhere else. We arrived in snow. For the first time, we lived with Canadian family. It was helpful to live with them for the first few weeks. They helped us with health cards, accounts. Right now, we are taking some language classes. The most important thing is communication and taking an English course. I hope refugees don't focus on working right away. This is a big opportunity to learn before getting job."

– Noori arrived in December 2018 with his Christian family. They had fled Iraq in 2017 after receiving threats on their lives.



A REFUGEE'S STORY

Inaz

"When we came here we took 4 or 5 days to adjust. The church people loved us and welcomed us. They prepared our house and our food. They prayed with us. Till this day they are helping us, they were so helpful."

– Inaz and her family arrived in Canada in the summer of 2018. They fled Pakistan following blasphemy accusations after participating in religious persecution protests.



A CHURCH'S STORY

Teams take the lead

By David Bornman

Over the past 15 years our congregation has become involved in several sponsorships: three men from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, along with a family of four and 12 other individuals; a family of five from Afghanistan; and one person from Iran.

We have found it useful to work with a B.C.-based organization called City of Refuge which is focused on finding sponsors for Christian refugees. They do the paperwork, and the church takes the responsibility.

Officially our church is responsible to the Canadian government for the first 12 months of settlement and financial support. Our church only does this if five families from our congregation form a support team and personally assume the financial responsibility (risk) required for that sponsorship. We have not made sponsorships part of our budget or regular offerings.

Our church only does this if five families form a support team and personally assume the financial responsibility.

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

David Bornman is pastor at West Coast Christian Fellowship, Vancouver.

A CHURCH'S STORY

Prayer is crucial

By Jenny Miedema

I run a settlement team of roughly 30 to 40 people. We have sponsored 20 Eritrean refugees. We began in the fall of 2015, and our first newcomers arrived last October. We have welcomed a single mother and her son, four cousins and one single man. Next we are expecting a family of five, then a wife and two children, and later a family of four and one more child joining his family after many years.

I have found it helpful to organize our team into subteams. We have a leadership of five people, plus myself, and teams which are responsible for:

- Shopping, food and household items
- Finances
- Housing and furniture
- Medical
- Language learning (ESL)
- Employment
- Children (school registration, communications with schools, car seats, youth groups, recreation – everything related to the kids)
- Transportation (bikes, buses, taxis, driver training programs, finding used cars, etc.)
- Spiritual care (depending on the religion of our newcomers, we connect them with a couple who will build relationships and pastor them, perhaps do Bible studies, whatever they would like)

We have a point person for each newcomer group who takes the main role of assessing needs and talking to them often about how they are doing.

Every team has a leader. We also have a point person for each newcomer group who takes the main role of assessing needs and talking to them often about how they are doing, being their main contact if they need anything.

Within the church settlement team, communication is crucial. The group chat app Slack is perfect for us. We create various channels on Slack and many of us are on it daily, sharing needs and



supporting one another. If someone needs a ride somewhere, we post the need there and a volunteer is quick to offer help. I cannot imagine doing what we do without this communication aid.

There are many things I would share with churches who are considering this step, or have decided to take it. I would say, *Go for it!* As a team we have experienced the power and presence of God in tangible ways, witnessed amazing answers to prayer and been pushed out of our comfort zones over and over again. We are always blessed by this. It has helped to renew and strengthen our faith in the Church – that it really can be a place of true community, praying for one another, caring for one another and working side by side to accomplish God’s purposes. Meaningful community and relationships have grown up within our settlement teams as we work alongside each other.

The wait time for refugees to arrive is long, but that time is well used by praying for them. I am sure God did much work in our hearts as we waited – three years from the time we decided to begin this ministry.

Jenny Miedema is a church volunteer in Orangeville, Ont.

The wait time for refugees to arrive is long, but that time is well used by praying for them.

TIMELINE

The sponsor's journey



INITIAL INQUIRY STAGE 1-3 months

Learning about refugee sponsorship, asking questions (depending on the sponsoring group), it may take time to form a team of volunteers, fundraise etc.

If a potential sponsoring group is not already connected to a refugee family, the match may not occur until the end of the initial inquiry stage.

PLANNING & APPLICATION STAGE 1-6 months

Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee (BVOR) applicants are pre-approved, so the application stage is quicker.

For Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR), the sponsoring group will focus on creating a settlement plan, fundraising, and assisting the refugees with completing the application paperwork.



SUBMISSION STAGE UNTIL ARRIVAL

1-2+ years

waiting/processing time for privately sponsored (PSR) or 3-6 months for BVOR refugees.

Processing timelines vary depending on the location of the visa office, of applications, security/medical screening needs of applicants.

SETTLEMENT/INTEGRATION

12 months minimum

May be up to 36 months depending on needs.

By applying to sponsor a refugee, the sponsor is agreeing to support the newcomer in all ways for a minimum of one year, and maybe up to 36 months depending on needs. During that time relationships are built, and some sponsors maintain relationships with newcomers for many, many years.

Once a refugee arrives in Canada, they are a permanent resident and no longer a refugee.



Air

EXIT HERE
IN EMERGENCY

WARNING: This cart is for use only for the purpose of transporting baggage and cargo. It is not to be used for other purposes. The use of this cart for other purposes may result in damage to the cart and the aircraft. Please use this cart responsibly.



la

IATA
ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE
AVIATION TRANSPORTS

TIMELINE

The refugee's journey



**FLEE
COUNTRY
OF ORIGIN**

**At a
moment's
notice**

Often leaving under cover of darkness, using smugglers, crossing borders irregularly, obtaining false ID.

**JOURNEY TO
COUNTRY OF
ASYLUM**

**1 day to
1 month
(or more)**

Depending on mode of transportation (walking, smugglers, airline, boat).

**REFUGEE
STATUS
DETER-
MINATION**

1-10+ years

Some Country of Asylum (COA) Authorities/ UNHCR applications can take over 10 years for refugee status to be determined (may be impossible if authorities are not sympathetic to claim).

**LOCATING
CANADIAN
SPONSORS**

1-2+ years

Depending if they have family already in Canada, or if they are fortunate enough to be referred by UNHCR to the Visa office for BVOR or Government sponsorship.



VISA OFFICE DECISION 1-2 years

Depending upon visa office requirements, number of applications, interviews and security/medical screening needs.

NOTICE OF TRAVEL 1 month to 2 years

Depending upon exit visa requirements, payment of overstay fines, complication of flight arrangements, other country specific requirements.

SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION: 12 months to 10 years

Depending on initial supports (community connections, employment opportunities available), Canadian citizenship can be obtained after four years as a permanent resident and obtaining a level four competency in all categories for language assessment.

Typical for many families to ask for sponsorship of relatives still living as refugees overseas (AKA: echo-effect) after their own year of settlement is finished.



INSIGHTS

Sponsorship in action

We asked a variety of faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders to share what they have learned. These are groups representing various denominations and refugee organizations across Canada. Here is their wisdom – the best and worst practices for churches.

Best practices

Before the family arrives

- Remember, you are starting a journey that will be a blessing for all involved. It will be in the walking *alongside*, rather than the *leading in front*, that the greatest gifts will be received.
- Pray fervently. Bring all you do to God. It is through and with Him that great things will be achieved.
- Enter into sponsorship without a hidden agenda. Opportunities may arise to share your faith organically, and newcomers may be invited to participate in church life, but they must never feel coerced or pressured to engage in the activities of the church.
- Engage the local community in welcoming newcomers. Introduce the family to people in their neighbourhood, community centres, schools and interest-based groups, not just those who are on the settlement team or who belong to the church.
- Consider working in partnership with other organizations or with other churches in your community to help settle multiple refugee families.
- If you are involved in the long process of waiting for named PSR (Private Sponsorship Refugee) families to arrive, consider engaging in a BVOR (Blended Visa Office-Referred) sponsorship of a single individual in the meanwhile. BVOR requires less of a financial commitment, and the team will gain significant knowledge having gone through a settlement experience without the full obligation required for a Private Sponsorship Refugee.
- Sponsoring requires a team of people with enormous amounts of patience. People are needed to drive family members to appointments, help with shopping, teach the transit system, help with school communications, help with bank accounts and

Introduce the family to people in their neighbourhood, community centres, schools and interest-based groups.

Keep a journal of activities, visits and conversations.

services, among many other tasks over a 12-month period.

- Be prepared for extra expenses, especially with dental work.
- Find good quality furnishings, even if it is second-hand. Offer and provide the best you can.
- Watch your expectations about receiving thanks from the family. Do not expect the refugee family to be pleased or express gratitude for everything. They are in a vulnerable, disadvantaged position and may feel embarrassed about their needs.
- *Document everything.* All in-kind deductions, financial arrangements, applications for various settlement services/benefits in Canada, and receipt or confirmation of those benefits. Provide a paper trail for all settlement funds being disbursed to the newcomers. Avoid providing cash or lump-sum settlement payments. It is best to arrange regular monthly deposits into their bank account, with the start-up costs provided in month one.
- Keep a journal of activities, visits and conversations.

After the family arrives

- As soon as possible, identify a “safe third party” person who is not a part of the sponsorship, but who the newcomers and the settlement team members can trust to go to for impartial mediation of any challenges that may occur.
- Connect with a settlement agency within the first week of settlement, even if your church provides internal settlement services. This can be beneficial for encouraging autonomous decision making as well as to obtain a needs assessment. The needs assessment will help in updating your settlement plan and budget to reflect any unanticipated costs (such as medical and dental) and settlement needs.
- Don’t be afraid to ask dentists, lawyers and other professionals for pro bono (freely donated) work for refugees. This could help a refugee family with serious dental issues – and save a significant amount of money. And ask local businesses for donations. The worst they can say is “no.”
- Make sure the family receives invitations into homes (conscious of dietary restrictions) and that they meet a variety of people as some may not be willing or feel comfortable meeting in a church setting.
- Carefully track all funds donated and spent on behalf of the family. A good paper trail is essential.
- Stay humble. We are all on a learning journey, and our worst



The “people of Canada” were awarded the **UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award** in 1986 for enthusiastically welcoming Southeast Asian refugees.



enemy is thinking we have it all figured out. Ask many questions, share information with each other and invite wisdom from others.

- Listen deeply. As you journey with refugees, listen carefully to them. Ask questions. Remember that you don't know as much as you think you do. Seek out learning opportunities.
- Ensure autonomy. Refugees are in need, but they want to make decisions for themselves like anyone would. Whenever possible, check with the refugees themselves when a decision needs to be made that may impact their lives or future choices. When in doubt, ask.

PHOTO: C/MAC

Stay humble. We are all on a learning journey, and our worst enemy is thinking we have it all figured out.

Practices to avoid

To help your group avoid potential mistakes, here is the Sponsorship Agreement Holders' list of things to avoid.

Avoid judging the family's decisions, even if we don't agree. Newcomers are free to make their own decisions.

- Controlling the newcomers: Avoid judging the family's decisions, even if we don't agree. Newcomers are free to make their own decisions. Sponsors may guide but not control.
- Requiring newcomers to adapt to Canadian ways of living. The sponsors' role is to introduce newcomers to life in Canada, helping them settle while honouring their new friends' cultural preferences.
- Taking a "yes" as straight up affirmation. When a newcomer says "yes," it does not necessarily mean comprehension and affirmation. Be patient and double and triple check your understanding.
- Allowing newcomers to put the sponsor on a pedestal. Newcomers may be very grateful for the help sponsors have extended and want to pay sponsors back. We can accept their gratitude with humility, as equals.
- Expecting newcomers to be grateful. In most cases, newcomers did not want to flee their home. Had it been safe, they would not have left. It may take some time for them to accept their new life in Canada.
- Believing that after the sponsors' one year is up, that's it. While a sponsor's legal obligation lasts a year, our humanitarian obligation does not. If the newcomers want an ongoing relationship, make every effort to do so, recognizing a change in the relationship from sponsor to friend.

A REFUGEE'S STORY

Ishmael

"The trip was very long. The town was too small, it was a big shock. No one tells me that I was coming to a small town. I began to enjoy nature, being in the mountains. People were very kind."

– Ishmael was displaced due to the Syrian war and gender-based persecution.



INSIGHT

Can my church request Christian refugees?

By Joanne Beach

This is a commonly asked question when church groups are considering refugee sponsorship. An inherent desire to assist persecuted Christians comes naturally to believers. Yet the global refugee crisis impacts people of all faiths. More than 5.6 million people have fled Syria since 2011 seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and beyond. Millions more are displaced inside Syria,¹ driven by a well-founded fear of war or persecution, regardless of their faith background.

Christians are persecuted along with many other minority groups who are also targeted by extremists. The plight of the Rohingya people from Myanmar is a recent example. More than 742,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh and other Southeast Asian countries in the last few years fearing for their lives.²

Both Christian and non-Christian refugees alike suffer from persecution or forced displacement and need sponsorship that will provide hope for their future. Through refugee sponsorship, Canadian Christians have a missional opportunity to demonstrate the love and compassion of God to all people, no matter the faith or belief system to which the recipients of their help adhere.

It is also important to consider that Sponsorship Agreement Holders are bound by an ethical framework of non-discrimination.

We advise sponsoring groups to allow the Spirit to guide their decisions on whom to sponsor. Prayerfully ask how God might use you to enrich or bless the life of another who is in need and be open to “welcome the stranger” without bias or preference based on race, religion or nationality.

Christians have a missional opportunity to demonstrate the love and compassion of God to all people.

For more information on refugee sponsorship go to www.TheEFC.ca/RefugeeResources

¹ UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html> (accessed September 24, 2019).

² UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html> (accessed September 24, 2019).

I AM A WOMAN FROM
DIJBOUTI

I AM A WOMAN FROM
KENYA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
ETHIOPIA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
CZECH REP

I AM A WOMAN FROM
GUATEMALA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
EL SALVADOR

I AM A WOMAN FROM
UGANDA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
ERITREA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
AFGHANISTAN

I AM A WOMAN FROM
COLOMBIA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
NIGERIA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
YUGOSLAVIA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
YEMEN

I AM A WOMAN FROM
VENEZUELA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
VENEZUELA

I AM A WOMAN FROM
GUATEMALA

4



A MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY

An opportunity to share God's goodness

By Sam Chaise

Increasing dangers in several regions of the world have forced millions of people to flee their homelands. The number increases each year. Refugees dream of settling in a new, safe place and making a new home. These asylum-seekers, distinct from privately sponsored refugees, arrive in Canada hoping to be recognized as refugees, to be allowed to stay and call Canada home. In Canada we use the terms “refugee claimants” and “sponsored refugees” to distinguish between displaced people who have arrived in Canada to make a refugee claim and those who make their claim outside Canada.

Refugee claimants arrive with no one to welcome them. They have been forced to leave their established life behind, and arrive with no guarantee their claim will be accepted (which would allow them to remain in Canada).

Together, both types of refugees – sponsored and claimant – represent significant inflows into Canada. However, refugee claimant numbers are increasing faster than sponsored refugee numbers. Here are the numbers:

- **Government Assisted Refugees:** 9,000 per year
- **Privately Sponsored Refugees:** 8,325 per year (1980-2017). The Canadian government has set a goal of 19,000 privately sponsored refugees per year.
- **Refugee Claimants:** average of 23,116 per year from 2007 to 2016 compared to 52,706 from 2017 to 2018.¹

Refugee claimants represent the largest group of refugees coming to Canada.

Refugee claimants arrive with no one to welcome them.

¹ Statistics Canada, 'Asylum Claimants', 150statcan.gc.ca, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2018001/article/00013-eng.htm> (accessed February 11, 2020).

Refugee claimants submit their claim to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, and often have to wait up to two years for their case to be heard. They live with great uncertainty and need support and care. Approximately 65 per cent of refugee claimants receive a positive decision, and so become permanent residents of Canada.

Whether these new Canadians are here for only two years, or permanently, they become our neighbours.

For the Canadian Church, refugee claimants represent a growing ministry need and opportunity, especially in large regional centres such as Southern Ontario, Montreal and Metro Vancouver where successful claimants typically initially settle.

Refugee claimants report feeling their lives are in immense upheaval, and they experience a great sense of isolation. Many are single parents with young children. They are afraid and uncertain for themselves, their loved ones who are with them and those they had to leave behind.

Many individuals and families are initially placed in an emergency shelter or emergency temporary housing for a few months. Eventually they move to inexpensive neighbourhoods while they wait for their refugee claim to be heard.

Churches are well positioned to offer critical social or practical help needed by refugee claimants. Connectedness is a gift the Church in Canada has to offer. Many basic needs have simple solutions: sharing a meal, having coffee with a young mom, arranging a playdate, driving someone without a licence or new to the city to an important appointment.

Just like anyone else, evidence shows that refugee claimants have better long-term outcomes if they are not socially isolated.

This is a chance for churches to bear witness to God's love to some of the most vulnerable people in the world, who are living in our communities. All it takes is some imagination. This could indeed be a *kairos* moment, a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action. This may be a time for the redemptive work of God to be done in a new way through God's Church in Canada.

- Churches located in larger cities could look to establish partnerships with refugee-serving agencies (especially since so many of those agencies are Christian).
- In smaller cities, connections might develop through a program

Refugee claimants represent a growing ministry need and opportunity, especially in large regional centres.



at the local YMCA, an initiative at the public library, or a program run by a local non-profit where churches can engage.

These first steps could lead to what could be life-changing relationships with our new neighbours.

The Church in Canada has great hope to offer. Amid evil circumstances around the world, God is bringing His Kingdom of love, freedom, justice and mercy. God is calling the Canadian Church to cultivate our identity as those who welcome, to be recognized as those who care for strangers (Exodus 22:21; Deuteronomy 10:19).

Regardless of how long the claimants stay, it is a positive witness for the Kingdom of God if the memory each refugee has of Canada is the love and care demonstrated by God's people. For those who do end up as our long-term neighbours, especially in the early

PHOTO: CHRISTIE REFUGEE WELCOME CENTRE

It is a positive witness for the Kingdom of God if the memory each refugee has of Canada is the love and care demonstrated by God's people

months and years of their life in Canada, we can be part of God's goodness in that part of their story.

There are already many Canadian Christian organizations serving refugee claimants. There are also many agencies that are not faith-based, but would welcome a working relationship with churches. Approach agencies with a general offer of assistance, and see what they suggest. Listen first, and talk later. Emphasize that your church is willing to serve people of all faiths or no faith. If the agency expresses concern about proselytization, assure them that is not your goal, and that you will treat all people with respect and dignity.

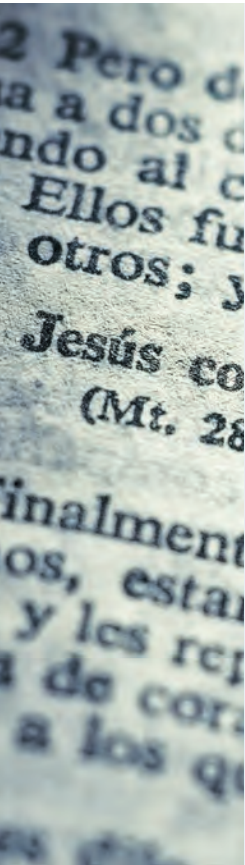
Sam Chaise is executive director of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, Toronto.

A REFUGEE'S STORY

Sandra

"When we left El Salvador, we left behind our business, our house our cars and money. It was a shock to adjust to asking for social assistance, to live in a small apartment, and learn to take public transportation. Though we were grateful. It was also difficult to adjust to the language barriers. At first you are afraid to talk because you don't want to make a mistake. It also hinders you from being able to continue your schooling right away or find a job – at least until you learn English. Church was very important to us. When we first arrived at Christie Welcome Centre, we asked if they knew of any other Spanish speaking residents, and if there was a church nearby. There was one just down the street. The pastor saw us arriving and welcomed us in Spanish! That made us feel at home. We have stayed at this church all these years. It made a community for us. Without them, our settlement would have been very different and I don't think we would have fully adjusted. I have seen people who have gone through worse things than my family did and that helps put things in perspective."

– Sandra Gonzalez, a Christian housing & settlement worker at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre. Sandra grew up in El Salvador and came to Canada in 2011 and recently became a permanent resident.



RESOURCES

Christian organizations working with refugee claimants across Canada

Abbotsford, B.C.
Inasmuch Community Society
www.inasmuch.ca
Fort Erie, Ont.
Matthew House Fort Erie
www.MatthewHouseFortErie.com
Hamilton, Ont.
Micah House
www.MicahHouse.ca
Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont.
**Mennonite Coalition for
Refugee Support**
www.MCRS.ca
Ottawa, Ont.
Matthew House Ottawa
www.MatthewHouseOttawa.org
Toronto, Ont.
Adam House
www.AdamHouse.org
Christie Refugee Welcome Centre
www.ChristieStreetRC.com
Matthew House Toronto
www.MatthewHouse.ca
The Peoples House
www.ThePeoplesChurch.ca/
 ThePeoplesHouse

Metro Vancouver, B.C.
**Journey Home Community
Association**
www.JourneyHomeCommunity.ca
Kinbrace Community Society
www.Kinbrace.ca
Windsor, Ont.
Matthew House Windsor
www.MatthewHouseWindsor.org
Winnipeg, Man.
Naomi House
www.NaomiHouse.info
**Find refugee settlement services
in Canada**
[www.Canada.ca/en/immigration-
refugees-citizenship/services/
refugees/help-within-canada.html](http://www.Canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada.html)



5



REFLECTION

Discussion questions

1. Do you agree that Jesus' life, particularly His childhood, bears similarities to a refugee's experiences? How are they similar or different? How does this comparison enrich the way you think of or engage with refugees?

2. Roy Berkenbosch writes, "God's people have a history of being forced to live on the move, forsaking the comforts and securities of home, regularly denied a settled life, forced to rely on the mercies of God. Those mercies are very often expressed through the compassion of others." The relative safety and comfort of Canada can make the stories of exile and life on the run – in the Bible and in refugee experience – distant and alien to us.
 - In what ways do you connect with these stories?
 - What helps you understand and empathize with the plight of people who face such different challenges than you might?
 - How do you describe the mercies of God?
 - What part do you believe you can play in expressing God's mercies to others?

3. When the Bible says to "love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners" (Deuteronomy 10:19), how does that resonate with you? How have you felt like a foreigner or identified with the experience of God's people who might be experiencing this kind of pain? Are there experiences of not belonging that have made you more willing or better able to help others?



WHAT CAN
I DO?



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Thinking through the best way you can to be involved in caring for refugees

1. Pray for God's leading

Consider what God is calling you to do.

- You can pray: "Who is the most vulnerable, Lord?"
- And: "How have you equipped us to serve in this area of need?"

2. Research

- Identify which sponsorship program to get involved in. Check out the Sponsor a Refugee webpage at www.canada.ca.¹
- Do a quick community audit. What existing services for refugees are in your area? Who is already doing this work that you could connect with and learn from? Check the list of Sponsorship Agreement Holders on page 62, the list of Christian refugee support agencies on page 59 or the Find Refugee Services in Canada webpage at www.canada.ca.²
- Talk to neighbours and community members to see if they know of a family who needs sponsorship or an already-arrived family who would like to sponsor relatives.

¹ Government of Canada, *Sponsor a refugee*, www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program.html (accessed January, 31, 2020).

² Government of Canada, *Find refugee services in Canada*, www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada.html (accessed January 31, 2020).

3. Evaluate your capacity – financial, physical, social

Try to identify how many people are willing to commit to this effort. Consider questions like:

- What resources do we have that we might use for refugee sponsorship?
- Would it be beneficial to support or partner with other sponsors or churches in your area?
- Can we support a group that provides outreach/care for newcomers in our area? Are there Government-Assisted Refugees in our community that we could reach out to and support?
- Is there a need in our community that is not currently being met? Could we provide things like furniture, clothing, food, fellowship, drives to appointments for refugees?

4. Become an advocate

Try to identify how many people are willing to commit to this effort. Consider questions like:

- For newcomer immigrants to Canada.
- For the localized needs of newcomers such as: low income housing, transferable skills recognition, language training for parents of young children, circles of support for elderly newcomers, trauma and mental health awareness and care.

Looking for more information on refugee sponsorship?

Check out these helpful links

www.TheEFC.ca/RefugeeSponsorshipResources

There are many more resources out there. Ask around and experienced volunteers will point you to more.



WHO WE ARE

Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders Working Group

A partnership facilitated by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and comprised of sponsorship representatives from its affiliate denominations and ministries.

Associated Gospel Churches

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www.AGCRSI.org

Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada

Paul Carline, Director of Intercultural Ministries
Jacqueline Derrah, Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator
www.Baptist-Atlantic.ca/Our-Convention/Departments/Intercultural-Ministries

Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec

Carol Gouveia, Chair SAH Working Group
Kevin Long, Refugee Liaison
www.Baptist.ca/Refugees

Canadian Baptists of Western Canada

Faye Reynolds, Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator
www.CBWC.ca/Our-Ministries/#engaging-in-mission

The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

Refugee Sponsorship Program Staff
www.CMACAN.org/Refugee-Sponsorship

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

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www.KBC.ca



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North Park Community Church

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The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Natalie Rogge, Refugee Resettlement Initiative
www.PAOC.org/donate/canada-refugee-sponsorship-opportunity

The Salvation Army Canada

Territorial Headquarters for Canada and Bermuda
Paula Marshall, Immigrant & Refugee Ministries Consultant
www.Salvationist.ca/Corps-Ministries/Corps-Life/Immigrant-and-Refugee/

World Renew Canada

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www.WorldRenew.ca/refugee-sponsorship

ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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Joanne Beach

Joanne Beach provides leadership to the relief and community development work of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada denomination (C&MA) and also gives oversight to the C&MA's National Refugee Sponsorship Program. She has traveled to more than 50 countries; many that included opportunities to meet refugees in a variety of contexts. Joanne serves on various boards including Canadian Foodgrains Bank and TearFund Canada. She earned her Bachelor of Religious Education at Ambrose University, and her Master of Theological Studies at Wycliffe College in the area of international and urban development.



Roy Berkenbosch

Recently retired from full-time service, Roy Berkenbosch has been at The King's University in Edmonton since 1995 and has a wide range of experience there including campus ministry, student life and teaching in the theology program. He is the founding director of The Micah Centre, which is also based there.

He has degrees from Calvin Seminary and has served churches in Canada and the United States. Roy has lived in Bangladesh and worked in many parts of the globe. He maintains active involvement with numerous organizations addressing global poverty and hunger, particularly World Renew with whom he is a theological advisor. Roy says his retirement is a mere formality that will not diminish his enthusiasm for teaching and remaining involved, but he welcomes a slower pace with time for reading and putzing at Yellow Dog Acres.



David Bornman

David Bornman has lived and served in East Vancouver as the senior pastor of West Coast Christian Fellowship for the past 22 years. He is the chairperson of West Coast Christian School and enjoys sailing with family and friends.



Sam Chaise

Rev. Sam Chaise directs the Christie Refugee Welcome Centre in Toronto. A graduate of the Arrow Leadership Program, he is currently pursuing a Doctor of Practical Theology in cultural intelligence and servant leadership. Sam served for five years as the executive director of Canadian Baptist Ministries, and was the founding director of the Carey Institute at Carey Theological College in Vancouver. He also served as a pastor and church planter in several settings in Western Canada.



Jennifer Miedema

Jennifer Miedema is the refugee sponsorship chair of the refugee ministry at Compass Community Church (Baptist) in Orangeville, Ont. Jennifer has been working to engage several churches in her community to participate in refugee sponsorship. She believes the Canadian Church is uniquely equipped to welcome the stranger.



Karen Stiller

Karen Stiller is a senior editor at *Faith Today* magazine and host of the podcast of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Her writing often touches on social justice issues, including the plight of refugees, and she has been involved with refugee sponsorship with local churches. She is the co-author of several books that explore the role of the Church in Canada and the world, *Craft, Cost & Call: How to Build a Life as a Christian Writer* (Friesen Press, 2019) and *The Minister's Wife: A memoir of faith, doubt, friendship, loneliness, forgiveness and more* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

CONCLUSION

We answer the call to welcome

Regardless of political, ethnic, and religious differences, and of the challenges that can come with them, we welcome. We remember how we too were once "foreigners in a foreign land." Many of us have our own family stories of immigration, only a generation or two back. We have not forgotten.

And what of our "spiritual immigration"? We all were strangers to a father-hearted God who, regardless the difference and distance between us rescued us from peril and unconditionally welcomed us in our need.

It is because of our God that we continue to answer the call to welcome.

We all were strangers to a father-hearted God who rescued us from peril and unconditionally welcomed us in our need.



Our mission

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada exists to unite Evangelicals to bless Canada in the name of Jesus.

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Faith-based Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) Working Group

A partnership of



RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM



SANCTITY
OF LIFE



CHURCH &
MISSION



FAMILY &
COMMUNITY



CARE FOR THE
VULNERABLE