

The Basics: Refugee Sponsorship

Who Is A Refugee?

The 1951 Refugee Convention spells out that a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." Globally, there are more than 21.3 million refugees with over 1.1 million refugees awaiting resettlement including the following populations: Eritreans, Burmese, Iraqi, Congolese, Bhutanese and Syrian.

What Is Refugee Sponsorship?

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees on Canadian shores – often referred to as the “Boat People” – in the 1970s mobilized Canadians to respond. In 1979, the Canadian government pledged to sponsor one refugee for each refugee that the Canadian public would financially and otherwise support privately. For the first time, ordinary people across the country became involved in assisting refugees to settle in Canada through private sponsorship, changing forever the way Canadians would view their role in Canada’s resettlement program.

Over 200,000 refugees who would not have otherwise been able to come to Canada were resettled since 1979. Each year our diocese warmly welcomes refugees into our communities and has come alongside those seeking protection for several decades. Through our Private Sponsorship Agreement with the Canadian government any of our congregations (or affiliated groups) can become sponsors for people abroad deemed refugees.

“As people of faith, we are called by the gospel to ‘welcome the stranger’ in our midst... from coast to coast to coast, Anglican parishes ‘welcome the stranger’ through Private Sponsorship Agreements and advocacy for the rights and hopes of refugees. I am very proud of your commitment to this ministry. It is a powerful witness to the law of Moses, the call of the prophets and the teaching of Jesus.”

The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz, Primate

Why Sponsor Refugees?

1. Jesus—himself a refugee—invites us to ministry that transforms lives.
2. With the crises in Syria and Iraq, the need to resettle refugees has never been greater.
3. Sponsoring a refugee family does not just change their life, it changes everyone’s life.

What Sort Of Commitment Is Required By Sponsoring Parishes?

Sponsorship involves a significant commitment of time and talent, as well as some treasure too. Sponsors will be required to provide for and support the sponsored individual or family for their first year in Canada. Sponsoring parishes will be required to provide monthly income support and start-up costs for items like furniture, clothing and food, along with any other costs that may be beyond the ability of the person(s) being sponsored to pay. The diocese will assist parishes through training, as well as work with parishes to complete a sponsorship application and work with the government throughout the approval process.

Some of the tasks that a sponsoring parish will undertake as part of their ministry include:

- greeting at the airport
- providing temporary accommodation as well as clothing, furniture and other household goods
- help to find permanent accommodation, employment, along with medical professionals (dentist, doctor)
- orientation in the city and community that includes climate, contacts for safety and emergency services, public transportation, education and health care, laws and customs
- financial orientation: budgeting, bank accounts, debit and credit cards

How Can Our Group Become A Sponsor?

A congregation, an ecumenical team, or an affiliated community group can indicate their willingness to undertake a refugee sponsorship by sending an email to refugees@niagaraanglican.ca. The initial email should indicate what has motivated your group to consideration becoming a sponsor, where the group is at in terms of organizing and whether you are hoping to sponsor a particular person(s) connected to your community or from a particular population given the gifts of your sponsorship team.