



Gaza Strip
Paul Jeffrey, ACT Alliance

Sponsoring Refugees:

A handbook for Presbyterian Congregations

Refugee sponsorship is a ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and is administered by Presbyterian World Service & Development. PWS&D is the agency of The Presbyterian Church in Canada which provides grants for community-based development projects and for emergency relief in disaster situations. Through its development education program, PWS&D promotes awareness among Presbyterians of international development and relief issues, and ways in which Canadians can respond.



50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, ON M3C 1J7
416-441-1111 • 1-800-619-7301 ext. 291
pwsd@presbyterian • www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd

** Parts of this handbook have been adapted from the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Handbook for Sponsoring Groups (www.rstp.ca)*

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The Refugee Situation

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."

Matthew 7:7

Who Is a Refugee?

All kinds of people are refugees. No one is a refugee by choice. Refugees are forced to flee out of fear for their lives and liberty. The 1951 Geneva Convention defines a refugee as "a person who, because of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or afraid to ask for protection in that country, or not having a country of nationality, is outside the country where he/she usually lived, and is unable or afraid to return to that country."

What Can Be Done?

For some refugees, the solution is repatriation—returning to the country which they have fled. This is possible only when conditions have improved to allow return in safety and with dignity. Unfortunately one-third of the world's refugees have been in their situation for over five years, and for most the possibility of returning home seems doubtful.

Some refugees are able to flee to a safe country where they are provided protection and status. However most refugees seek asylum in countries neighbouring the areas of conflict, Often these are developing countries with limited resources that cannot offer permanent solutions. Many refugees remain in camps or live in urban settings without access to basic rights.

Resettlement to a third country such as Canada is a solution for a very limited number of refugees.

How Do We Help?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada supports and assists refugees in refugee camps, and helps them restart their lives in a normal environment, either through repatriation or resettlement in Canada.

One person in fifty is now a refugee or migrant. Most of them are women and children, often separated from each other. Most seek shelter in countries which are already poor, while richer nations close their doors.

Jesus Christ, exiled as a baby and a migrant in Egypt, is present in and among all who are uprooted. We, who have been baptized into his new life, are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace among all people.

Overseas assistance and repatriation

The Presbyterian Church in Canada formed The Committee on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee, and World Service in the post-World War II era, to provide refugee and disaster relief. This committee was the progenitor of the Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D). PWS&D continues to provide food, shelter, education and income generating opportunities in refugee camps overseas. These camps are always meant to be temporary, the people are meant to be repatriated or settled. However some refugee camps have existed for decades and there are generations of people who have grown up in “temporary” refugee camps. PWS&D supports programs that help these people live with dignity. When situations stabilize and refugees can return home PWS&D partners help provide infrastructure like housing and seeds and tools, dig wells, and support income generating programs, which help refugees rebuild their lives in their home countries.

Resettlement in Canada

The PCC's involvement in refugee sponsorship in Canada began with the resettlement of Indo-Chinese refugees in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was an overwhelming response from churches at that time. Today, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an official Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). This agreement allows Presbyterian congregations to sponsor refugees from overseas to begin new lives in Canada.

Refugee advocacy

The PCC advocates for refugees. In June 1995 the PCC along with other denominations issued a statement entitled “A Call to Conscience: a Statement on Refugees” which said “The Second World War happened, in part, because not enough ordinary people spoke out against the racism and intolerance which was developing in the 1930s. Never again. We will speak and act on behalf of those whose lives and human rights are threatened at this time. We owe this to those who lost their lives. We owe it to ourselves to future generations - to become a nation we can hope in.”

The PCC continues to advocate for refugee issues through a number of Canadian refugee advocacy groups, including the Canadian Council for Refugees and Action Réfugiés Montréal. Working together we encourage governments to address the root causes of refugee flows and ensure that government programs and procedures for resettling refugees and protecting refugees in Canada are just and compassionate.

The rest of this online handbook outlines the process a congregation must follow to sponsor a refugee to come to Canada. This handbook complements the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program’s Sponsoring Group Handbook and the Refugee Sponsorship Application—available online at www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd/refapp

PWS&D Mission Statement

Faithful to our calling, we endeavour to respond.

Presbyterian by profession of faith, ecumenical by confession of faith, and inclusive in our practice of faith, we gladly serve women and men, young and old, according to their need and regardless of their faith. In a world with too much poverty, injustice and oppression concentrated in nations of the South, we recognize the interrelation between our affluence and the suffering of others.

We undertake service among churches and organizations seeking to transform their communities by promoting justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

We are committed to development, involving men and women in activities that restore human dignity, ease the pain of want, promote self-help and encourage community cooperation that benefits all members. Development activities will always be sensitive to gender issues, empowerment of the marginalized and the protection of human rights.

We undertake to promote development education and awareness within Canada, sensitizing and connecting Presbyterian men, women and children to the needs of others throughout the world.

Colombia

ACT Alliance



Refugee Sponsorship

Have you heard the knocking at the door?

Every week, sometimes every day, people "knock at our door."

Some are refugees who live with a fear so great that they are forced to uproot themselves and their children, leaving behind all that is home to them.

Refugees describe desperate life and death situations – situations that are validated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. When we do not open the door with offers of help, these people remain trapped. Most face a high probability of persecution, torture, death, or (at best) stagnation for years in a refugee camp, waiting to get on with their lives.

What is Sponsorship?

Refugee sponsorship is a three-way partnership between sponsors, the government of Canada, and the refugees themselves which allows refugees with no other solutions to resettle here in Canada. Sponsorship requires groups of people who are committed to working alongside refugees in order to ensure that they have the necessary support to integrate into life in Canada. Sponsorship enhances Canada's ability to offer protection to refugees, as privately sponsored refugees are over and above the number of refugees that the Government of Canada commits to resettle each year through the Government Assisted program.

Types of Sponsorship

The majority of sponsorship cases authorized by the Presbyterian Church in Canada are private sponsorships; however, on occasion churches are asked to do joint assistance sponsorships.

Private sponsorship

The Refugee sponsorship is fully funded by sponsoring groups. Sponsoring groups commit to providing basic support and care for the sponsored refugee for a set sponsorship period, or until the sponsored refugees become self-sufficient—whichever comes first. Generally the sponsorship period is 12 months; however, depending on the needs of the refugee, the length of the sponsorship may be extended up to 24 months.

Joint assistance sponsorship

The government funds the sponsorships with private sponsoring groups providing logistical and moral support, usually for a period of 24 months.

Government assisted

The sponsorship is fully funded by the government, with settlement support provided by government funded settlement agencies. No group is involved.

Who Can Sponsor a Refugee?

Congregations sponsor refugees under the Presbyterian Church in Canada as the Sponsorship Agreement Holder. Groups of Five and Community Sponsors apply directly to the government and the PCC is not involved.

Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) and their Constituent Groups

Sponsorship Agreement Holders are established organizations that have signed the Sponsorship Agreement with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. Currently there are over 80 SAHs across Canada, ranging from

*Opening Doors
For Ourselves
and Others*

*"Give and it will
be given to you."*

*Helping refugees
is not simply a
responsibility or a
duty. When a
refugee knocks
and we open the
door, the door also
opens for us. We
receive an
opportunity to
live more
faithfully and in
closer relationship
with God.*

*"Listen! I stand at
the door and
knock."*

Revelation 3:20

religious organizations, to ethno-cultural groups and other humanitarian organizations. The Sponsorship Agreement Holder, or SAH, assumes overall responsibility for the management of sponsorships under their agreement. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder. Therefore congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Canada may sponsor refugees.

Groups of five

Any group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents, who are at least 19 years of age and who live in the community where the refugees are expected to settle, can also sponsor refugees. In G-5 sponsorships the individuals act as guarantors that the necessary support will be provided for the full duration of the sponsorship.

Community sponsors

An organization, association or corporation that meets the criteria for community sponsorship has the ability to submit two sponsorship undertakings per year. They must undergo financial and settlement plan assessments by their local Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) office each time they wish to sponsor.

Why are Sponsors Needed?

At the end of 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that there were 43.3 million people who were forced to leave their homes due to conflict or persecution, the highest number since the mid-1990s. Of these, 15.2 million were refugees. In the same year, only 112,000 refugees were resettled to third countries due to a lack of available resettlement spaces. Canada's private sponsorship program is a way to increase the availability of resettlement to refugees who have no other durable solution.

Why Should Churches Sponsor?

Jesus clearly called us to serve the least powerful and the poorest in our world. He also called us to participate with God in bringing about new life. In doing so, we make full use of our abilities and resources, finding ourselves renewed and blessed by God's presence.

Privately sponsored refugees benefit from the morale support they receive from their sponsors. Congregations often experience unexpected rewards from refugee sponsorship—members become closer to one another as they work together in meaningful service; some find that a far-off country becomes a real place; others come to an understanding of the day-to-day realities and priorities of their own lives; some find the opportunities for intercultural exchanges; and some experience deep intercultural friendships.



Afghanistan
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How do congregations find refugees to sponsor?

Groups may learn about a refugee's protection and resettlement needs from:

- A group or family member who knows a specific person or family group waiting to be sponsored.
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada national office or other congregations that have sponsored refugees.
- A referral from Citizenship and Immigration Canada of a refugee in need of resettlement (known as a "Visa Office Referred" sponsorship).

What Do Sponsors Do?

During the Sponsorship Period sponsors are responsible for:

- Reception – meet the refugee family at the airport and welcome them to the community; provide orientation to life in Canada
- Lodging – provide suitable accommodation, basic furniture and other household essentials
- Care – provide food, clothing, local transportation and other basic necessities of life
- Settlement assistance and support by helping with:
 - Completing required forms such as health insurance, social insurance and child tax benefits
 - Opening a bank account
 - Learning English or French (e.g., registering in ESL/LINC or FSL/CLINC class)
 - Understanding the rights and responsibilities of permanent residents
 - Accessing resources (i.e. community support groups, settlement services, etc.)
 - Registering children in school
 - Locating a family physician and dentist
 - Finding employment
 - Becoming independent.

Organizing Refugee Sponsorship

Discernment

It is very important to carefully discern if refugee ministry is appropriate for your congregation. Set up a committee to assess your congregation resources (financial and human), its interests (in a certain part of the world, or in refugees with particular characteristics or needs), and its commitment (time, personal involvement). Survey the congregation to assess as accurately as possible, and to give everyone the opportunity to get involved. Gather information from Presbyterian World Service & Development, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and local churches with sponsorship experience.



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Form a sponsorship group

If your congregation agrees to go ahead with sponsorship they need to form a Sponsorship Group with session approval. Information collected from the congregation and others will help the group to select refugees, complete the PCC sponsorship application form, and begin preparations for their arrival.

The sponsorship process can take a long time, and many pieces of the puzzle must be in place before the PCC can approve the sponsorship.

Complete the sponsorship application form

To receive preliminary approval for the sponsorship, the congregation must complete the PCC application form, available from PWS&D online here:

www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd/refapp

Research and write a settlement plan

As part of the PCC application, a settlement plan must be submitted. A settlement plan details what the congregation will do to orient and support the refugees during the sponsorship. It will provide the congregation with a framework to work through the myriad details of who will do what, when, how, with what resources—and where those resources will come from. Groups need to plan a monthly budget for the person(s) they are sponsoring, taking into consideration any special needs. The budget may include financial and in-kind donations and must be for a level of support equal to local social assistance levels.

Raise funds

The congregation should start to raise financial and in-kind donations to cover the financial requirements of the refugee according to their plan.

Submit the application form and settlement plan to PWS&D

This settlement plan and application form must be approved by the Presbyterian Church in Canada before the sponsorship can go forward. If the application receives preliminary approval, the congregation will be asked to have the refugee family complete an Application for Permanent Residence.

Submit applications to PWS&D

The congregation needs to complete an Undertaking to Sponsor application and submit it to PWS&D along with the refugee's completed Application for Permanent Residence. Once all documents are in order, PWS&D will submit the application and supporting documents to Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

PCC Refugee Mission Study: Staying Rooted in an Uprooted World

The Presbyterian Church in Canada offers a comprehensive refugee mission study, looking at what Scripture has to say about people who are unjustly uprooted and the current reality many people face today. Participants will explore God's call to both welcome the stranger and address the underlying causes that force people to be unjustly uprooted.

To learn more or download a copy, visit www.presbyterian.ca/resources/online/4696

Preparation of the refugee's file overseas

The congregation then waits while the refugee's file is prepared overseas. CIC forwards the Undertaking to a Canadian Visa Office overseas. The visa office opens a file and assigns the refugee applicant a visa post number, and the applicant is wait-listed for an interview.

Screening process overseas

If the applicant is determined to be a refugee in need of resettlement he/she will have a medical exam. If the refugee is cleared by the medical exam, he/she will need to pass a security and criminality check.

It is important to know that approximately 40% of sponsor-referred private sponsorship applications are refused. To help avoid refusals, PWS&D will assist you to review the details of the refugee's situation carefully before signing the sponsorship.

Visa, notice of arrival, travel and landing

If given clearance, the refugee can obtain Transportation Loans from the government that help them pay for certain expenses including the cost of medical exams and travel.

Note: Refugees must repay their loans after arrival in Canada. Congregations are not responsible for repaying immigrant loans.

The refugee will then be granted a visa. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranges travel for the refugee and the congregation receives a notice of arrival. The Refugee is "landed" upon arrival and becomes a Permanent Resident of Canada.

Greet the refugee

The congregation will have greeters, and possibly an interpreter, meet the refugee at the airport and take them to where he or she is staying. Then, the settlement plan takes effect.

Report on sponsorship activity

The congregation will provide bi-annual reports to PWS&D on sponsorship activity so that PWS&D can report annually to General Assembly and to Citizenship and Immigration Canada on sponsorship activities.

Evaluate

Evaluation of the sponsorship experience is particularly important if your sponsorship group or congregation thinks it may sponsor future refugees.

Celebrate

At the end of the year celebrate your achievements and mark the anniversary of the newcomers' arrival.

Theological Reflection

The people of God have always been called to a special concern for the “stranger and sojourner.” This concern is an acknowledgment of history: “you were strangers in the land of Egypt” and of God's grace: “I brought you out...”

Moses hiding from Pharaoh in Midian; Elijah on the run from King Ahab; Mary and Joseph finding haven in a foreign land from a murderous Herod; Jesus “withdrawing” from Jerusalem and Judah because of enmity against him, until his hour had come; Paul escaping from more than one city over the wall at night—all were refugees.

A refugee is a victim of war, injustice and oppression. Protestants from France were refugees in Geneva when John Calvin summoned the church there to minister to their needs as a Christian calling. Many people in our churches now, or their forebears, came to the New World from situations of distress and persecution, and they recognize the predicament of today's refugees as one they share with people of faith both in the pages of the Bible and the history of the church. Christians today are called to minister to refugees because “we were also refugees...”

Jesus himself makes this identification even stronger. Disciples of Jesus hear their Lord saying, “I was a stranger, and you took me in. . .” (Matthew 25). Because of such words, we consider that in serving the needs of refugees, we are given a present opportunity to serve Jesus in person.

Ministry to refugees is also joined to our Christian hope. It expresses our calling as a pilgrim people, “strangers and sojourners” in fact, with no homeland on earth, who are looking for one that is to come (Hebrews 11). The refugee who comes to us is walking more obviously and visibly on the journey all of us walk in faith. People who journey together help each other out along the way.

In some former eras, the churches sought particularly to help those immigrants and refugees who shared their faith tradition; Presbyterians for example, were drawn to help migrants with roots in the Reformed Churches of Europe. There are advantages to such an approach; the shared faith made more immediately evident what giver and recipient had in common. It is probably still true that there are ways of helping which only a shared faith tradition can make possible. But today, refugees come from countries of many different faith and cultural traditions. In many cases refugees do not have forerunners of their own faith and culture in Canada, in a position to help to the extent required. It is important in this situation that we learn to care for people not of “our own kind” for reasons that go deeper than the direct possibilities for congregational growth. The stranger is entitled to our



DR Congo

ACT Alliance

care whether or not he shares or comes to share our faith. The refugee should experience from us a genuine love and acceptance, he or she may be moved to ask the ground of that love and the reason for the hope that is in us. But prior to any such question, we already rejoice in our service, because Christ has permitted us in giving a “cup of cold water” to the stranger to whom we minister, to serve God. As we are faithful to the Gospel mandate, men and women will be drawn to the church and find their place within it.



Haiti

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The congregation gathered is a centre for preaching and teaching; often the Gospel is acted out as the congregation is "scattered" and individuals perform their ordinary service in the world. In ministry to refugees, this model may also apply: individuals moved by the Gospel may go outside the congregation to find ways of serving. Such Christians may find themselves willingly joined with others whose motivation has first source elsewhere than from Christian faith, but whose service is nevertheless genuine and caring. In acting out of their own faith, and in a spirit of thankfulness for the grace God gives, such Christians will continue to look for support in the fellowship and prayers of their congregations.

There is need for the church not only to proclaim but also to model the caring which is our Lord's command. This is especially the case for the costly forms of caring, such as refugee ministry, which in some ways go “against the grain” of popular sentiment and are certainly made more complex by cross-cultural considerations. Grounded in the prophetic and Gospel tradition, the church has a calling to minister to those others would leave aside; made one with people of every condition in Jesus Christ, the church has both experience and calling to reach across boundaries of race, culture, nationality, and language. Those who engage in direct ministry with refugees on behalf of the congregation will need the support of the whole congregation and the larger church, not only for financial needs, but also in prayer for the often disheartening work of caring for people deeply wounded in mind and spirit. The special ministry of the church will begin with addressing physical needs—for food, clothing, shelter, and orientation to a new community. But it will continue to extend friendship and acceptance in the power of Christ, recognizing and understanding the difficult spiritual journey of people cut off from ancestral homes. It will not demand that refugees adopt at once our country and our ways; they still have a country they care about, and may want to go back when conditions are better. Keeping alive the ways and the language of their roots is one way for refugees to maintain hope in that possibility. As Christian friends we will recognize the deep importance of such hope, even as we encourage the steps that will make self-reliance possible here in Canada.

Because the refugee is a victim of war, injustice and oppression, ministry to refugees must include the dimension of prophetic witness, advocating for peace, justice and freedom on behalf of, and with, the refugee. Such witness will address our own government: its policies for receiving and supporting refugees must give priority to making sure refugees are not sent back to situations of danger, and be compassionate as well as fair. Our government will also be addressed to do its part in international forums to influence the events in the refugees' homelands, towards ending war, violation of human rights, and oppression of minorities. We will call on our government, corporations, and people to recognize the parts that economic relations and the arms trade play in perpetuating the oppressive regimes that generate refugees, and ask

them to act with social responsibility. While we may not fully understand or share the particular political vision with re refugee, we can understand the refugee's quest for justice and democracy. Through church links with mission and development projects in other lands, and through our ecumenical relationships, it may often be possible to become better informed on the changing situation in refugees' homeland, and to take initiatives that will contribute to positive changes.

Some who minister to refugees may find their gifts drawing them towards direct practical service; others towards prophetic witness. Nevertheless, each should recognize the need for the others' gifts as part of a complete ministry for refugees.

** "Theological Foundations for Refugee Ministry" adopted by the Refugee Ministry Advisory Committee, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1987.*

Partners Resource: Welcoming Refugee Friends to Canada

The Presbyterian Church in Canada offers a comprehensive mission learning/sharing experience for children and youth with real stories of refugee young people around the world. Objectives of the resource are to help children better understand what it means to be a refugee, who refugees are, and the refugee sponsorship process.

To download a copy, visit www.presbyterian.ca/resources/online/4636

Afghanistan

Paul Jeffrey, ACT Alliance



Biblical Texts

“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

Isaiah 65:21-22

“Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land.”

Genesis 12:10

“You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 23:9

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Leviticus 19:33-34

“Your God executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

“If you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter; if you say, “Look, we did not know this” - does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?”

Proverbs 24:11-12

“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.”

Ruth 1:1

“Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” Then she said, “May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.”

Ruth 2:10-13

“The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.”

Psalm 146:9

“What must I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.”

Luke 10:25b, 27

“Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you.”

Matthew 2:13

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house.

Isaiah 58:6-7a

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my saviour; you save me from violence.”

II Samuel 22:2-3

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him,” for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,”

Matthew 25:31a, 35

** All scripture quoted from NRSV*

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