

A Short Q & A on Refugee Sponsorship in the Diocese of New
Westminster with Refugee Unit Chair, the Reverend Michael McGee,
rector of St. Christopher's, West Vancouver.

Q What is a refugee?

- A. Following the Second World War, the UN was instrumental in establishing human rights declarations and international laws to protect the rights of refugees. A refugee, as defined in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is a person 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 or return there because there is a fear of persecution...”*

Refugees are not economic migrants. Refugees are not immigrants who voluntarily relocate to another country. Refugees are asylum seekers who are persecuted in their home country and often their lives are at risk. Refugees flee their home country because they are in need of international protection. CIC recognizes its obligations to assist these persons through Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), a Canadian law enacted in Parliament on All Saints Day in 2001. The Act recognizes that in the first instance the refugee program is about saving lives and offering protection to persons who are displaced and persecuted. The Act's objectives are to fulfill Canada's international legal obligations with respect to refugees and to provide assistance to those in need of resettlement.

Q. Is Canada at risk of letting in terrorists as it relaxes its policies and rushes to let in Syrians?

- A. CIC has temporarily modified its requirements for Syrians to establish through organizations like the UNHCR that they are refugees. Canada recognizes that the extent of the civil war in Syrian means that people fleeing that country are generally refugees. While refugees from Iraq and Syria do not need to prove their refugee status, their admissibility to Canada is not a given and therefore every refugee claimant must be interviewed by a Visa Post Officer. All refugees must still pass security, criminal, and medical screening in order to be admitted into Canada as permanent residents.

Q. What does it mean that the diocese is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder?

- A. In the late 1970s, Canadians opened their borders and their homes to Vietnamese refugees. The federal government recognized at that time that faith organizations were

able to mobilize effectively to raise the funds and provide the human resources necessary to assist refugees with their settlement into Canadian life and society. In order to augment the capacity of Citizenship and Immigration Canada to assist refugees, CIC established the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program (PSR) by entering into agreements with faith organizations across Canada. Many Canadian dioceses, including our own, became Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) in the 1980s. This means that in addition to the number of refugees assisted by CIC, more refugees can be settled by the partnership between CIC and SAHs. Today there are 82 SAHs across Canada that include faith based groups as well as ethno-cultural groups such as the Afghan Women's Association, and humanitarian groups like World University Service of Canada (WUSC) which has a student refugee sponsorship program.

The Diocesan Refugee Unit facilitates our obligations as a SAH. We ensure that our Constituent Groups (CGs), mainly our parishes, understand and are supported in their obligations within the PSR program and that the diocese upholds its responsibilities as a SAH.

Q. What are the responsibilities of the SAH, the CG and CIC?

- A. The diocese as the **SAH** is obligated to ensure that the sponsorship applications meet the criteria for refugee settlement. That means that to the best of our knowledge the principal applicant meets the refugee eligibility criteria and that the CG's settlement plan is viable and sustainable in terms of financial and resource capacities. A member of the DRU will meet with the CG to explain the program and provide assistance in submitting the application to CIC. The DRU will monitor the settlement process from the perspectives of the refugee, the CG and the diocese.

The **CG** will ensure that it has the capacity to meet its settlement obligations for the duration of the plan which typically is 12 months, or until the refugee is self-sufficient, whichever comes first. The settlement plan is meant to meet the immediate financial and emotional needs of the refugee in such a way that it empowers the refugee to become self-supporting. The sponsoring group should provide not only the finances but also the education and skills that will ensure independence. Settlement obligations include, but are not limited to:

1. Meeting the refugees at the airport
2. Arranging and providing short term and long term suitable accommodations
3. Food (financial assistance, meal planning if needed, where to shop)
4. Setting up the home (furniture, food staples, school supplies, computer etc).
5. Clothing
6. Transportation
7. Arranging Internet & Phone
8. Orientation to new community and settlement services
9. Arranging health care: vision, physical, dental
10. Language and job skill training as needed

The DRU will lead the CGs through a self-assessment of their capacity to meet these obligations of sponsoring refugees and establishing a settlement plan.

CIC will provide information and training for the SAHs. CIC will determine whether the applicants are eligible and admissible for settlement into Canada. CIC will arrange for medical tests, initial clothing and the transportation to Canada through the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Q. How can my parish help?

A. It is my personal opinion that the general support of refugee sponsorship is the obligation of every Anglican, and for that matter, Canadian. However, it is also my opinion that the settlement of refugees in every parish may not be practical for a variety of reasons. I know that the financial and human resources required for successful sponsorship are significant and no one should lightly undertake this responsibility. I also know that sponsorship brings life to both a parish and a refugee, but the priority must always be in consideration of the refugee. Therefore there are some questions that each parish must ask itself, with the priority being that of the ultimate impact of locating the newcomer in any given community. If upon reflection your parish realizes that it cannot sponsor on its own, please consider partnering with another parish to do so, or offer to support a parish in another deanery that is sponsoring. If refugee sponsorship seems right for your parish, or if you have more questions, please contact the Diocesan Refugee Unit.

Questions Your Parish Needs to Ask

- Will the newcomer's religious and dietary needs (e.g. Halal) be met in our community?
- Does our community have the resources to meet the psycho-social needs of the newcomer?
- What are the employment opportunities?
- Are our schools equipped for newcomers with language needs?
- Will the newcomer be able to afford living in the community when our financial support has ended?
- Can we ensure that the newcomer has access to necessary services?
- What impact would geographical distance from the services have on the individual?
- Is there a settlement agency like Mosaic that can be an additional resource to the newcomer?
- Is public transportation readily available?