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Refugee

Resettlement



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Introduction

Christian Reformed Churches from across Canada have been actively involved in the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program since its inception in 1979. With compassion, churches have responded to the many and diverse needs of refugees from around the world providing them with hospitality, friendship, support and encouragement. As a result, hundreds of refugees have successfully re-settled in Canada.

World Renew is the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church that has supported and facilitated Canadian churches' involvement in the private sponsorship of refugees. World Renew is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) with a legal agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to privately sponsor refugees. The mission of World Renew's Refugee Sponsorship is as follows: World Renew will partner with churches, individuals and refugee organizations to facilitate the process of refugee sponsorship to Canada in collaborative activities of love, mercy, justice and compassion and to advocate for refugee rights globally.

World Renew's 'Refugee Resource Manual' has been developed as a tool and information resource for churches to use as they engage in the process of decision making regarding private sponsorship and as they undertake the activities of settlement. The resource manual is to be used in tandem with the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) 'Handbook for Sponsoring Groups' (www.rstp.ca). The Handbook provides details of the private sponsorship process that are not included in this resource manual. The resource manual references the Handbook throughout.

World Renew extends a warm thank you to those seeking to engage with refugees. Your acts of love and kindness will bring joy to many others as well as to you and your community.

World Renew partners with Diaconal Ministries Canada in the refugee sponsorship program.

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Preparations, Procedures and Practices for Effective Refugee Sponsorship

Making the decision to sponsor a refugee family involves much thought and prayer. It is important to review the steps involved in the refugee application process, and to understand the responsibilities that your congregation will commit to if undertaking a refugee sponsorship. We don't want you to underestimate the time and resources that are needed. At the same time, we also want to assure you that many churches have sponsored refugee families and worked through both the challenges and joys of sponsorship. Most people who have been involved in refugee sponsorship find that they have been blessed by the experience—far more than they ever imagined when they offered to help others in this way.

Note: *Throughout the document reference is made to the 'Handbook for Sponsoring Groups'. This Handbook can be found online at www.rstp.ca (on the homepage under resources)*



A. Pre-arrival

i) First Steps - Making an informed decision to Sponsor a refugee family:

- Read Handbook Chapter I “An Overview of Refugee Sponsorship” (‘Handbook for Sponsoring Groups’ www.rstp.ca).
- Speak with your deacons about the church’s potential to sponsor a refugee family.
- Find a group of interested individuals and form a refugee committee of 8-10 members.
- Talk about the process and commitment involved, including the financial commitment.
- Learn about types of private sponsorships - sponsor-referred, Visa Office Referred and Joint Assistance Sponsorship (Handbook Chapter I pp. 4-5).
- Become familiar with the sponsorship application documents.
- Contact World Renew refugee program office for information and resources.

ii) For a sponsor-referred family (*This is a sponsorship in which your church identifies the family you would like to sponsor, perhaps responding to a request from within your community*):

- See Handbook Chapter 3 for who can be sponsored and the eligibility criteria.
- The World Renew refugee office will help with eligibility determination and information for completing the application forms (Handbook Chapter 4 “Sponsorship Application Forms” & Section I “Sponsorship Agreement Holders & Constituent Groups.” Note: Your church is a Constituent Group).
- Submit application to World Renew Refugee office; World Renew will prepare the additional forms that the congregation representative must sign.

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- World Renew submits application to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada processing centre.

iii) For a Canadian government referred family (*This is a sponsorship that is referred by the Visa Office or is a Joint Assistance Sponsorship which includes financial assistance from the government*):

- Contact the World Renew refugee office for advice.
- Submit a “request for a refugee profile” or find out if there are referred families available to be sponsored.
- After receiving the referral, meet as committee and with your deacons to make a decision on whether or not to sponsor that referred individual or family.
- All settlement work and financial commitments for Visa Office Referred (VOR) sponsorships are provided by the sponsoring church; some blended VOR cases receive financial assistance from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
- Joint Assistance Sponsorships (JAS) receive financial help from the government. These are families with special medical needs, or very large families. (Handbook Chapter 9 & Fact Sheet 9).
- World Renew will complete the application forms and your contact person (usually a deacon) will sign the documents.
- World Renew submits to Citizenship and Immigration Canada processing centre.

iv) Develop a Settlement Plan:

- Plan for housing, furniture, education, interpreters, English as Second Language classes, clothing, transportation, potential employment, health care (provincial and Interim Federal Health), introduction to Canadian culture, crisis & trauma counseling, and recreation.
- Financial planning: budgeting and cost tables (Handbook Chapter 7, pp. 6-7).
- Locate available community & provincial services (Handbook Chapter 7 Fact Sheet 7.1).
- Download and copy pertinent sections of the Handbook for committee members.
- Begin to raise funds or plan offerings for refugee settlement costs.

v) After submitting the application:

- Meet regularly as a refugee committee.
- Select a chairperson who is able to give spiritual leadership, beginning the meetings with scripture reading and prayer (see devotional resources).
- Strive to develop a sense of community among committee members by caring for each other, allowing each to give his/her input, and by building consensus in decision making.

vi) Committee Members' Roles

The time commitment for settling a refugee family is high, especially in the first several weeks after arrival. Experience has demonstrated that it is beneficial to have a committee of people, rather than one individual, devoted to the sponsorship of an individual or family. It is very challenging and taxing for one person to provide all the support for a newcomer(s). With each committee member taking on a specific role, the settlement process will be smoother for the newcomer(s) and everyone involved. The following is a list of duties to consider as you determine how many members you should have on your committee.

Possible roles for committee members (based on typical needs of refugees):

- An executive team (chair, secretary & treasurer)
- A resource and application coordinator who
 - a) thoroughly reads the Handbook and resources
 - b) keeps the committee updated on the status of the application
- Main contact person for refugee family (regularly phones them, visits them, and assigns committee members to help them with various needs that arise)
- Transportation organizer
- Medical coordinator
- Education coordinator
- Housing coordinator
- Contact person with World Renew
- Banking/budget coordinator
- Shopping coordinator
- Yard and home maintenance coordinator
- Employment coordinator
- Person to complete necessary forms
- Person to locate community services for newcomers, including English as a Second Language classes

vii) Keep your Sponsoring Community Informed

- Be sure to keep your congregation up-to-date on the progress of your committee and the refugee application. Let them know when the decision is made to sponsor and when the application is submitted, give updates in the bulletin and make announcements during worship services, especially as the arrival approaches.
- Provide information about the refugees' home country and conditions that have caused them to flee their country.

B. Arrival and first few days and weeks

- Choose who will meet refugees at the airport—if the whole committee goes, it can be overwhelming for the arriving refugee individual or family.
- Have an interpreter along that speaks their language.
- Help your sponsored family understand that you are the “private sponsors,” and make sure they understand what that means to avoid false expectations regarding government support (see information for privately sponsored refugees in resources).

viii) Orientation

- Handbook Chapter 7 p. 11: The first 24 hours is a critical time, first impressions are important.
- Show newcomers how to use things in the house or apartment—water faucets, electrical appliances, smoke alarms, several things may be new to them. Repeat this information after a few days to make sure they have understood.
- Make sure they have a phone number that they can call at any hour; provide newcomers with a list of committee member’s names and telephone numbers.
- See orientation sessions in *Oh! Canada* provided by World Renew Refugee office; arrange to carry out orientation sessions with the family; find an interpreter if necessary.
- See Handbook for list of what to do in the first 24 hours, first few days, first few weeks and months (pp. 11-13).
- Apply for provincial health care, child tax benefits, SIN numbers in first week or two (Handbook Chapter 8 Fact Sheet 8.1 & 8.2); apply for Interim Federal Health Program if applicable.
- Explain repayment of Transportation Loans.
- Ask if they would like to call family members overseas to report their safe arrival; explain the phone and limits on long-distance calling.

ix) One Year Window of Opportunity Application

- If a spouse or dependent child has been left behind in the country of origin, country of asylum or elsewhere, prepare to submit a One Year Window of Opportunity application for that family member left behind. (Handbook Chapter 8 Fact Sheet 8.3).
- World Renew refugee office will provide advice and links to the appropriate forms.

x) First few weeks and months:

- Find permanent housing, if refugees are in temporary accommodations. Remember to locate this housing near public transportation or near the schools and shopping that the family will frequent.
- Enroll children in school.
- Complete language assessment for ESL classes. Even if refugees speak English, have them assessed for ESL classes.
- Orient the individual/family to life in the community including shopping, public transportation, settlement services, culture.
- Talk with refugee family about budgeting and finances.
- Help newcomers to find connections among people from their own country.
- Education/Training:
 - o Encourage newcomers to further their education or receive job training during the 12 month period that they are being supported by the congregation.
 - o Help them to enroll in classes or find employment as soon as possible.

xi) Confidentiality and Privacy:

There are many reasons to maintain privacy for the refugee and newcomer families. Some are related to common sense and some to the law in Canada. See Handbook Chapter 7, p 16 for guidelines.

xii) Interpersonal Relationships:

- The dynamics of each refugee family are different, and this will have a bearing on your work as a refugee committee. Sponsoring a widow and her children, for example, will be very different from sponsoring a two parent family. The newcomer family has a history that will have implications for your relationship to them and their relationship to each other. Be sensitive to group dynamics.
- Be willing to help them but don't assume that you will become friends or that they will express gratitude to you. Refugee committee member typically choose to do resettlement work because they are compassionate people. Be careful not to get too emotionally involved.
- Try to connect the refugees to people from their own culture who live in your community who can ease the cultural transition and the loneliness that accompanies it.

continued....

- Refugee families may be interested in joining your congregation, or they may want to connect with another church or faith group in the community. Allow them the freedom to worship (or not) as they choose.
- Register the refugee children in affordable community programs, such as on soccer teams or in swimming lessons, so that they can meet other children and become more involved in their community.

xiii) Mentoring

- Consider matching each child with a member of the congregation for building a relationship and for tutoring, if necessary.

xiv) Financial Support

- Refugee committees fund the work of refugee resettlement in various ways. Special collections, private donations, and benevolence fund contributions are probably most common.
- In some communities, several churches band together to support one group of refugees, each contributing financially or otherwise.
- Other communities host fundraising events such as a refugee dinner or auction sale. Appeal to the congregation for good quality, used furniture, household items, clothing, bikes, and other such items.
- Help the family establish a lifestyle that they can maintain after the sponsorship is completed and your financial support has ended.
- Your commitment must be for 12 months or until the refugee is self-sufficient, whichever comes first; if this is a “blended visa officer referred” sponsorship, explain that the government is providing some of the financial support.
- In a sensitive way, explain that the church’s finances are not unlimited and need to be used responsibly. Explain to them how the money is raised. Inform them that as they begin to work and earn money the church support will gradually be lessened until at the end of twelve months when they may be self-supporting.
- If the family is not going to be self-supporting after 12 months, help them prepare to apply for social assistance. Single-parent families, families with many children and families with health problems will likely not be self-supporting after 12 months.



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Facing the Unexpected

Each refugee committee faces expected tasks and responsibilities, such as finding housing and employment, organizing schooling and ESL classes, scheduling medical appointments, and more. But often committees encounter unexpected tasks and responsibilities due to unforeseen circumstances. Refugee committee members from Christian Reformed Churches throughout Canada have shared stories of unanticipated and sometimes difficult developments during their sponsorships. We are going to share some of these scenarios with you below.

Our purpose in sharing this compilation isn't to focus on offering solutions to each problem these churches encountered while sponsoring a refugee. Rather, we hope to prepare you for the fact that no sponsorship journey follows a predictable path. Refugee sponsorship is a complex process. Each is unique. Outcomes can't be forecast. Besides preparing you, we also hope these stories will encourage you as you remember that others have faced obstacles and have, by God's grace, prevailed.



1. Housing

Each refugee committee is expected to find housing for the refugees. That's a responsibility you count on having. However, sometimes housing becomes an unexpected challenge. Consider the following scenarios:

- i. You sponsor a family of refugees that came at extremely short notice (which is not uncommon), and arrive before you have found adequate housing for them. You arrange for them to stay with other recent refugees from their native land. While there, they discuss housing possibilities among themselves. Your refugee family is informed by their hosts about desirable and undesirable places to live in your town. When you choose housing for them that is within your (and their) budget, but in one of these "undesirable" locations, they are dissatisfied. They then choose an apartment that will be too expensive for them to afford once your sponsorship is completed. Without the funds to rent the apartment, the family might have to go on social assistance, and could be forced into a housing crisis.
- ii. You house an extended refugee family in a spacious home that has two apartments. You soon discover that family members have long simmering hatred for each other and won't, or can't, live together. When allegations of sexual abuse between family members arise, it becomes clear that the lease will be broken and the family will split up, now needing two residences.

2. Material Goods

Providing necessary material goods for the refugees is an expected responsibility—one that is usually easily managed with the goodwill of a supporting Christian community. However, sometimes this aspect of refugee sponsorship poses unforeseen challenges. Consider the following development:

You have supplied everything that the refugee family needs. Because you want to work within your church's budget and be stewardly with material things, you collect gently used, good quality furniture and household goods from your enthusiastic church fellowship. You assume that the goods will be treasured. However, within a few months, you discover that most of what you contributed has been discarded and replaced with brand new items. You wonder, why did we go through all this effort only to have everything given away? And, you think, if future needs arise, can we in good faith ask our community to contribute again when their last offerings weren't valued?

3. Death

When you sponsor refugees, your thoughts are about life, not death. All your efforts are geared to helping the newcomers flourish. However, that's not always how events develop. Consider the following two circumstances:

- i. Your committee welcomes an extended family consisting of a grandmother, two of her children, and five grandchildren. Three weeks to the day that they arrive in Canada, the grandmother dies because, unbeknownst to you, she is terminally ill with cancer. Because the family came to Canada through a Joint Assistance Sponsorship between the Canadian government and two churches, funeral costs are paid for by the government. However, you are involved in funeral planning with government officials, funeral home staff, and clergy. You also support the family through offering prayers, empathy, physical presence during the visitation and the funeral, and a luncheon after the funeral.

ii. Your committee deals with tragedy when a refugee child is struck by a car and killed soon after the family arrives in Canada. You and your church community support the family through visits. Funeral expenses are paid for by the church and the funeral home.

4. Refusal to Settle in Your Community

When you welcome refugees to Canada, you expect that they will settle in your community. However, almost directly or in the next few months you discover that your assumptions were incorrect. Consider these possible developments:

- i. After five months in Canada, the mother of the refugee family decides that she wants to return to her native land for one month. In her absence, her teenaged daughters are left on their own, a frightening prospect after recently resettling in a new country. The mother returns. However, after being in Canada for a year, she again goes back to her native country, leaving the girls to fend for themselves with the help of refugee committee members. She returns to Canada every six months so that she won't lose her permanent residency status.
- ii. As soon as you have your sponsored family settled in the apartment, the teenage boy asks when they can move to a large city. He doesn't want to live in a small town because he is uncomfortable in a place where few visible minorities live. At school he meets other non-white students and so he is able, for a while, to accept where he lives. But, before the end of your year-long sponsorship, once again the family talks about moving. They want to relocate to a city where their friends live. You try to discourage them from making the move until the sponsorship is complete and the school year is finished, but they decide to leave beforehand. You do what you can for them to make the transition as smooth as possible.

5. Sexual, Physical, and Verbal Abuse

When you sponsor refugees, you hope for the best in terms of human relationships, both within the refugee family and between the refugees and the committee. However, your expectations aren't always realized. In fact, sometimes you are horrified to discover that sexual, physical, and verbal abuse are problems that you have to confront. Consider these two cases:

- i. One of the refugees accuses the other of abuse, and informs your committee of the accusations. You weigh the information, aware of the fact that at times people falsely accuse others of sexual abuse. You also know that the allegations could be true. You are responsible for both the accused and the alleged victim of abuse. You call Family and Children's Services (FACS) to discuss the case. Some of the family members enter a shelter for a short time. Afterward, FACS makes it clear to the refugees that the alleged abuser may not be in the vicinity of other family members.
- ii. One of the refugees is verbally abusive to committee members -- pent up anger turns to vocalized rage. The refugee is confronted about his aggressive behavior, but he refuses to change. Eventually, he and his family leave your community. You breathe a sigh of relief because his unwillingness to adopt healthy forms of communication has soured your relationship.

6. Lying

When you enter a relationship in good faith, you expect the same in return. You enter refugee sponsorship in a spirit of truth. However, you discover that sometimes it is not reciprocated.

Perhaps if you consider where refugees have come from and what they have had to do to survive, you won't be as shocked or hurt when you discover they have lied to you. Desperate people will do what they need to do to survive. Does that excuse their lying? Of course not, but it does give you a framework in which to deal with it. If you decide to confront the refugees about lies that have been told, be prepared for any number of responses: more lies, denial, anger, acceptance, repentance, or a desire to be more truthful in the future.

7. Physical Infirmities

You assume that information provided to your committee prior to the refugees' arrival will enlighten you about any medical concerns that they have. However, when the family arrives, you discover that some of the refugees have significant physical challenges. Perhaps, the father suffers from post traumatic stress disorder and is unemployable because of his mental state. Maybe a family has a child with severe cerebral palsy. Or, perhaps a parent who is legally blind arrives in the care of your committee. You access the services in your community that best meet the needs of each individual. Your committee needs to rethink the time commitment that the sponsorship will take and might call on others to carry the unexpected load.

8. Criticism From Church Members

When you participate in refugee sponsorship, you might assume that everyone in your church community will feel the same passion for this calling of God that you do. However, you learn that you are mistaken. Consider this situation:

You are sponsoring a Muslim family in the post 9\11 years. Many in the world have turned against Muslims and you discover that some people in your church share their opinion. When you are confronted by your brother or sister in Christ with the belief that the church should only sponsor Christians, you try to calmly explain that, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was not making us consider who our neighbor is, but whether or not we are willing to be a neighbor. As you care for the Muslim refugees, you pray for their daily needs, as well as for their salvation. Over a period of five years, you gain the trust of the mother of the family. You discover that Jesus has appeared to her in visions and she has come to know Christ.

Suggestions for Coping With Unexpected Challenges

Unexpected challenges require coping mechanisms that will keep a refugee committee healthy and functioning. The following suggestions are not specific suggestions geared to the problems cited above. Rather, they are general guidelines that can be applied to many difficult situations.

1. Be Realistic

Be aware that you will face problems. Don't expect that the sponsorship will be effortless and easy. It probably won't be. If it is, you will be pleasantly surprised. Take the long view. If things are difficult, try to picture where the refugees will be in five or ten years in terms of employment, education, assimilation, spiritual life, and emotional healing.

2. Communicate

Clear communication is one of the keys to the development of a flourishing sponsorship and to the functioning of a thriving refugee committee. When communication with the refugees breaks down, either because of misunderstandings due to language or cultural differences, or because of personality clashes, extra effort needs to be made to restore it. The same is true for communication among refugee committee members. The clear articulation of goals, roles, responsibilities, and frustrations are necessary to keeping a common vision alive – the mission of caring for the refugee family no matter what difficulties emerge.



3. Examine Expectations

Each refugee committee member enters the sponsorship with some expectations of what will happen. Be aware of the expectations that you have of the refugees. Are they fair and realistic? Are you expecting the refugees to assimilate into Canadian life and to become independent faster than they are able to? Or are your expectations of them not high enough? Are you doing too much for them so that they don't learn to become independent and, instead, form an unhealthy dependence on the refugee committee? Are you trying to fix all their problems, instead of giving them the knowledge and inspiring the confidence they need to become contributors to society? Do you expect the refugees to attend your church and worship with you? Or are you expecting that they will make their own choices as to where they will worship, if at all?

4. Access Outside Resources

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, so it takes more than a refugee committee to help a refugee family re-settle in a new land. As problems arise, contact people who can be of assistance: your pastor, settlement workers, the children's aid society in your area, Citizenship and Immigration officials, teachers, refugees who have already settled in Canada, and people from their own culture who live in your community. Each of these people might have valuable input to lighten your load and broaden your understanding of the refugees.

5. Celebrate

Celebration hardly seems like a solution to problems, but it can be. Even when you face difficult circumstances, take time to celebrate refugees' birthdays and other occasions. Generous love and small gifts contributed in a party atmosphere can go a long way to forging love, healing wounds, and building trust.

6. Blessings Experienced

God sustains, protects, and loves you as you struggle through trying circumstances with refugees. But he also changes you. He makes you more open to people from different cultures and ways of life out of the realm of your experience. He shapes you to be more patient when you face adversity with them. He helps you to realize that you don't have all the answers and that you can't fix all the problems. Only he does and only he can. He teaches you to pray fervently, sometimes desperately, as you strive to be his hands and feet to newcomers. He makes you aware that ultimately you are serving him as you serve the refugees, and that all that matters is that he receives the glory. It doesn't belong to you. He is the source of your joy when things go well, and especially when they don't. He gives you the privilege of gaining the trust of the refugees and of sharing love. In other words, he pours out his blessing on you in unexpected ways. You realize that, when all is said and done, no unexpected challenge is too great for Yahweh, the Almighty Lord of all.

Compiled by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Devotions

God is Always Faithful

Being part of a refugee committee can be rewarding and rigorous, exhilarating and exhausting. Regardless of your experience, God is your source of strength and energy. God will be present and faithful to you as you welcome newcomers to Canada. Begin each of your committee meetings in the presence of the Lord who rejoices in your acts of service for refugees, but who takes even more pleasure in the fact that you come near to him. Draw wisdom and strength from his word. Praise him for his faithfulness in a world that seems out of control. Thank him for stooping down to love you and all the displaced people in the world. Intercede for refugees. God will be faithful as you carry out your ministry to refugees.

1. Beginning with Our Faithful God (Read Philippians 2:12-13)

When Paul admonished the Philippians to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12b), he based his confidence in God. Paul understood the mysterious, divine process at work in the lives of believers who sought to honour God with acts of mercy and service. He knew that the good works they were doing weren’t initially their own idea. Instead, believers’ good works began with our faithful God nudging, prompting, and urging them to take up various tasks. Paul explained: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

Sponsoring refugees is a way of working out your salvation with fear and trembling. God has worked in you to will and to act according to his good purpose of caring for refugees. He wants you to mirror his role as “a refuge for the oppressed” (Psalm 9:9a). Psalm 82:3-4 describes what that implies: “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

What a comfort it is to know that you are sponsoring refugees because it is God’s good idea. He will provide all you need. “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Prayer: Faithful God and refuge of the oppressed, as we begin this good work of caring for refugees, help us to grasp the divine, mysterious way you are working in our lives. We thank you that our work originated in you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

2 .God's Faithfulness Reaches to the Skies (Read Psalm 57)

There have always been refugees - people seeking shelter from danger, persecution, and war. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah described the anguish refugees feel: "Refugees stream to Zoar, and then on to Eglath-shelishiyah. Up the slopes of Luhith they weep; on the road to Horonaim they cry their loss. The springs of Nimrim are dried up - grass brown, buds stunted, nothing grows. They leave, carrying all their possessions on their backs, everything they own, making their way as best they can across Willow Creek to safety. Poignant cries reverberate all through Moab, gut-wrenching sobs as far as Eglaim, heart-wracking sobs all the way to Beer-elim" (Isaiah 15:5-8, The Message).

Thinking about all the refugees who have sought shelter throughout history can be overwhelming and discouraging. The problem is so large. Skeptics may ask, "why bother trying to deal with issues so far-reaching and wide ranging?"

But you are not one of the cynics who throw their hands up in despair and choose to do nothing. Because you know that "God's faithfulness reaches to the skies," (Psalm 57:10b), you are willing to do your part to sponsor and resettle refugees. You know nothing is a match for God's supreme faithfulness. As you care for the refugees you have sponsored, you will witness that in ways you never dreamed of.

Prayer: Dear Lord, guard our hearts and minds with the vision of your faithfulness, so that we are kept from discouragement at the enormity of the number of refugees and the problems they face. Use us to make even a few lives better through this sponsorship. May we do so only for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

#3. Surely the Lord is in This Place (Read Genesis 28:10-22)

Leaving home on a long journey can make a person feel vulnerable and afraid. That's how Jacob felt when he left his home in Beersheba and set out for Haran to find a wife. He didn't know what he would encounter.

What – or, rather, who – he encountered was beyond his wildest dreams. In fact, the one whom he met appeared to him a dream. Our faithful God made promises to the deceitful Jacob that he was not worthy to receive. Besides other things, he promised to watch over Jacob wherever he went. When Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it" (Genesis 28:16b).

You are on a sponsorship journey with refugees who have experienced their own journeys. God has faithfully watched over them so far. He has also taken care of you. His love for all of you does not depend on your awareness of his faithfulness. But he longs for you to grow in your consciousness of his presence. As the weeks and months of the sponsorship pass, may you increasingly profess, "Lord, we are aware that you are in this place!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are blind to your faithful presence unless you give us the eyes of faith to see you. As we care for refugees, help us to feel your nearness. In Jesus' name, amen.

#4. Transformed for God's Glory (Read 1 Peter 4:7-11)

Peter wasn't the same man when he began his journey with Christ as he was years later when he wrote to Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor about being self-controlled, loving deeply, offering hospitality without grumbling, and using gifts to administer God's grace in its various forms. He had been sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit working in him so that his life gradually and steadily became what God intended it to be.

The same process of Holy Spirit activated sanctification is at work in all of you, also as you care for the refugees who have come, or will come, to your church community. The Holy Spirit will help you to be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray for them. He will fill you with a deep love that will cover over a multitude of sins and circumstances gone awry. He will give you the energy and conviction to offer hospitality happily and without grumbling. He will encourage each of you to use the particular gifts God has given to you to serve these refugees and to faithfully administer God's grace to them in different ways. He will take your words and let them be the very words of God. He will give you strength to serve – power that you don't possess on your own.

Your sanctification will be for God's glory. He is the faithful one who can and will transform you into faithful servants.

Prayer: Dear Lord, make us aware of your sanctifying hand on our lives every day. As we care for refugees, help us to act more like Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

#5. The Battle Belongs to the Lord (Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-18)

God is the Rock that will not be moved, the unshakeable foundation of those who put their trust in him. King Jehoshaphat knew that when troubles surged over him like violent waves, his faithful God would not abandon him. So, when the armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites attacked him, in trembling faith, he prayed, "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

Jahaziel, on whom the Spirit of the Lord was poured out, told King Jehoshaphat, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's . . . You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you" (2 Chronicles 20:15b; 17a).

The battle was the Lord's then and it still is today. As you help to resettle your refugee family, you will experience both joyful and difficult times. No matter what the circumstances, remember that the battle belongs to the Lord. He is faithfully working out his purposes for both you and them. Your calling is to be in the place God has ordained for you to be and to watch as he wins his battle in his own time and way.

Prayer: Dear God, we so often worry when we feel powerless or confused about what to do next. As we embrace our calling to care for refugees, remind us that we are standing on you, our Rock and unshakeable foundation. Help us to rest in the knowledge that the battle belongs to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

#6. Taste and See That the Lord is Good (Read Psalm 34)

The psalmist David invited believers to “taste and see that the Lord is good” and to acknowledge that “blessed is the man who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).

Doing good to refugees begins with tasting and seeing that the Lord has been good to you. He has given you salvation through Jesus Christ, the bedrock of your lives for today and eternity. He has given you freedom, education, food, shelter, clothes, jobs, families, a Christian community, health, and much more. Your cup overflows!

Also, God shelters you and gives you refuge. Through you, he will do the same for the refugees he has sent to you.

Because of trauma, war, hunger, and persecution these refugees have faced, it might be difficult for them to taste and see that the Lord is good. Pray that he will use you to help them to “taste” and “see” the presence, protection, and love of our faithful God.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you are the light of the world (John 8:12a). Allow your light to shine through us so that when the refugees see our good deeds, they will “taste” and “see” your goodness and will praise your name. In Jesus’ name, amen.

#7. Let Love and Faithfulness Never Leave You (Read Proverbs 3:1-6)

The Bible is replete with metaphors – word pictures – that help you to better understand your relationship to God and what he requires of you. Usually a word picture makes an abstract concept more understandable. For example, Proverbs 3:3 says, “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.” Of course, you can’t literally wear love and faithfulness around your neck like a magnificent necklace. Neither can you actually inscribe love and faithfulness on your heart as if it were a stone tablet. Yet, the word pictures help you to see how God wants love and faithfulness to be an integral part of who you are as his child. You can’t get away from your own neck and heart. God doesn’t want you to get away from love and faithfulness, either.

As you sponsor a refugee family, keep these word pictures alive in your mind. Allow them to spur you on to deeds of great love and faithfulness. As you do so, reflect on Proverbs 14:22b: “Those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, “with you is the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9a). We thank you for all the word pictures you give us in the Bible which help us to better understand how we can serve you. As we care for refugees, help us to bind love and faithfulness around our necks and to write them on the tablets of our hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.

#8. Faithful Provider (Read 1 Kings 17:1-16)

After Elijah told King Ahab that Israel would suffer from a drought for the next few years, God sent Elijah on his way, telling him where to go and what to do. Ravens fed him and a brook's water quenched his thirst. When the brook ran dry, God commanded Elijah to go to the widow at Zarephath - a foreigner - to supply his needs. Elijah must have known immediately that the widow was poor and had limited resources. Maybe he wondered what God was doing.

The widow probably wasn't too pleased to be asked to feed another hungry person. Was the foreign holy man kidding when he asked for a drink and bread? She might have thought, I'll give this man an inventory of my meager resources and then perhaps he will understand how ludicrous his request is. The widow told Elijah that the meal she was preparing was to be the last one she would ever make, and afterward she and her son would die.

Elijah said, "Don't be afraid!" - words that have echoed throughout the Bible from the lips of angels, prophets, and Jesus, himself.

The widow must have been shocked by his words. Don't be afraid when resources are depleted? Don't be afraid when death is at the door? Don't be afraid when all hope is gone? Elijah's explicit instructions included a promise that would change the woman's physical and spiritual life. The God of Israel promised that "the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land" (1 Kings 17:14).

What was the widow's response? Amazingly, she obeyed. She could have told the foreigner that he wasn't welcome, that his words were nonsense, and that she would have nothing to do with him. But she followed Elijah's instructions. She set aside her fear, offered hospitality to the stranger, and learned that our faithful God's multiplication of resources is always enough to meet every need.

By taking care of refugees, you are following the widow's example. You have set aside your fear of caring for the stranger. You have faced your anxiety of not having enough to share. You have obeyed because you know God is faithful. When Jesus returns, you will hear him say to you, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Prayer: God of miracles, multiplier of resources, we trust you to faithfully care for us and the refugees we are blessed to serve. In Jesus' name, amen.

#9. A Bruised Reed He Will Not Break (Read Isaiah 42:1-9)

Jesus came from heaven to earth in baby-weakness, despite the fact that he is Almighty Lord of heaven and earth. His kingdom's agenda isn't about grasping power at the expense of the weak and helpless. Rather, he is concerned for the broken, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. About him, the prophet Isaiah wrote: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3a).

What did Isaiah mean? He meant that "the servant will mend broken lives" (NIV text note for Isaiah 42:3a). "Bruised reeds" and "smoldering wicks" are not disposable in Jesus' eyes just because they are weak, powerless, and unprotected. Because he is faithful, he'll step in "to bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth" (Isaiah 42:3b-4a). All people are weak, powerless, and vulnerable without the embrace of our faithful God, the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God mends broken lives. Now he sends you, his ambassadors, to care for others, including the refugees you have befriended. Pass on to them the tenderness and mercy God has poured out on you.

Prayer: God of the broken-hearted ones, use us to show your mercy and kindness to the refugees you have brought into our care. Mend their broken lives through us. Make us faithful as you are faithful. In Jesus' name, amen.

#10. Yet – The Hopeful Connecting Word (Read Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Yet is a small word with immense, hopeful implications for Habakkuk's life and yours as you reflect on your responsibility to the refugees you are sponsoring.

Habakkuk didn't base his joy on circumstances. He didn't say that he would only be joyful when the fig trees budded, the vines produced grapes, the olive crop thrived, the fields produced bumper crops, and the pens and stalls were filled with sheep and cattle. Instead, Habakkuk's faith in God shaped his response to events, whether negative or positive. He knew that his Saviour was sovereign over everything and faithfully gave him strength to overcome all obstacles. Therefore, he rejoiced.

For Habakkuk, yet was a hopeful connecting word. How can yet be a hopeful connecting word for you as you take up God's calling to care for refugees? You, too, can rejoice in your Saviour even as you think about the immense problems these refugees have faced. You can joyfully choose to depend on Him – the God of all provision – to give to you so that you can give of your resources to them.

You can ask God to help you to understand how you are connected to them. In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote, "We are bound together in what the Bible calls 'the bundle of life.' Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. . . . We are made for community . . . to exist in a delicate network of interdependence. . . . Each person is not just to be respected but to be revered as one created in God's image" (Doubleday, 1999, pp. 196).

When you step out in faith to care for refugees, you will be imitating Habakkuk's faith and boldness. Also, you will be displaying a profound understanding of your connection to all people in "the bundle of life." You will be rejoicing in God and obeying him, no matter what. You will be saying, in effect, that though the economy isn't always promising, though sponsoring refugees is demanding, though you are already busy, yet you will obey God who "is known by his justice" (Psalm 9:16a), and whose throne will last forever and ever, with a scepter of justice as the scepter of his kingdom (Psalm 45:6).

Prayer: God of all hopefulness, we rejoice in you because we know that you are sufficient in all circumstances. Our lives and the lives of refugees are in your faithful hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

#11. “The Gospel on Five Fingers” (Read Matthew 25:31-46)

North American secular culture teaches you to take care of yourself first and to look away from the suffering of others, including refugees. But that is not what God has in mind for you: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God” (Proverbs 14:31). By caring for refugees you are honouring their Maker and yours. By putting others first, for the sake of Christ, you are spreading the gospel and the love of God.

Mother Teresa, in her instructions to members of her religious order, suggested a visually profound, yet simple way to remember this truth. She called it the “‘Gospel on five fingers’ – as she liked to say, ‘You - did - it - to - Me’ – one word for each finger. With this, she wanted the Missionaries of Charity to remember the poor – not only to respect the dignity of the child of God in each one, but also to realize the supernatural reality of God’s presence in each one” (*Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light – The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta,”* edited by Brian Kolodiejchuk, Doubleday, 2007, pp. 314-315).

I’d like to invite you to do a simple exercise. Hold your hand in front of you. Touch one finger per word as you say, “You - did - it - to - Me.” That’s “the Gospel on five fingers.” With your hands, you can make a huge difference in the refugees’ lives, doing it for the Lord. With your open hearts, you can embrace those seeking refuge, pointing them to Christ. With your mouths, you can proclaim the faithful love of God that upholds and embraces both them and you.

Prayer: Maker of all, we bow before you, praising and exalting you for allowing us to care for refugees. Give us willingness to learn from their experiences, humility to depend on you, and love to undergird all our endeavours. In Jesus’ name, amen

#12. Rescue the Weak and Needy (Read Jeremiah 38:1-13)

Ebed-Melech is a little-known biblical character who obeyed God's command to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Jeremiah, the prophet, was in prison because he relentlessly spoke God's word of judgement against his people for deserting him and following idols. The officials wanted Jeremiah silenced because he was demoralizing the soldiers and the people. With the approval of weak-kneed King Zedekiah, Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern. It was so deep that he had to be lowered in by ropes. Though the cistern had no water in it, it was muddy, and he sank into the muck.

Enter Ebed-Melech, a Cushite who was an official in the royal palace. Ebed-Melech was not his name; it was his title, meaning "king's servant." Being a nameless foreigner didn't stop Ebed-Melech from taking action. Boldly, he went to the king and told him of Jeremiah's plight.

At King Zedekiah's command, Ebed-Melech took three men with him to free Jeremiah. But what he did next on his own initiative is of great significance. He found some old rags and worn-out clothes, and took them with him to the cistern. He told Jeremiah to put them under his arms to pad the ropes. Then he and the soldiers pulled Jeremiah out of the cistern. Ebed-Melech not only took action when he saw Jeremiah treated unjustly, but he did so with deep compassion, caring about Jeremiah's comfort.

Jeremiah was not a refugee, but he faced injustice, abandonment, mistreatment, hunger, and pain just like many refugees do today. Like Ebed-Melech, you have compassionately spoken up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of the refugees you are sponsoring.

Prayer: God of justice, help us to faithfully seek justice for those who can't speak for themselves. Fill our hearts with compassion as, step-by-step, we follow your Holy Spirit's leading to care for refugees. In Jesus' name, amen.

#13. That the Work of God Might Be Displayed (John 9:1-11)

Jesus saw a man blind from birth. He didn't just see his physical state, but he saw the man in his entirety, as a whole person who was suffering. Compassion, love, healing, and God's glory were on Jesus' agenda for the man.

What did the disciples see when they looked at the man? Their question to Jesus – “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2) – reveals that their agenda wasn't compassion, love, and healing. Instead, they saw a person whom they thought deserved judgement based on the principle that the rabbis had developed which stated: “There is no death without sin and there is no suffering without iniquity” (NIV text note for John 9:2). Thus, the disciples hoped to lay the blame for the man's blindness at the man's or his parents' feet.

But Jesus would have none of it! Revealing his perfect agenda, he replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me” (John 9:3-4a). A preacher I recently listened to summed it up this way: “Don't focus on the cause of this man's blindness, but focus on the purpose.”

In this story, we are challenged to see all people as Jesus sees them. You are sponsoring refugees. When you look at them, do you see them as Jesus does – not just their physical state, but in their entirety, as whole people who are suffering? Do you seek to be compassionate instead of curious about their tormented backgrounds? Are love, compassion, healing, and displaying the work of God your focus? Do you believe that God will empower you to care for them?

God is writing his story through your response to refugees. Compassion, love, healing, and God's glory are on his agenda for them. Work, watch, and wait as he faithfully accomplishes his purposes.

Prayer: Dear God, you bring renewal and hope to your children. You “bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3a). Display your work in the lives of the refugees we are sponsoring. In Jesus' name, amen.

#14. Working for Peace and Justice (Read Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 4:14-21)

As sponsors of refugees, you are working for peace and justice. As peacemakers, you can be assured that what you sow in peace will “raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18) because God will faithfully sustain you. What shape might that harvest of righteousness take in your life and the lives of the refugees you are sponsoring?

More than food and shelter, more than water and clothes, refugees long for peace. Peace from the horror of rape. Peace from the fear of being murdered. Peace from the dread of children being sold into slavery. By sponsoring refugees, you are offering them first steps toward peace in their lives. Gently, slowly, and sensitively, you may point them to the Prince of Peace, who told his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

By supplying housing, food, community, schooling, and employment, you will introduce stability and peace into the lives of people who have known instability and strife. To sleep in safety, to have sufficient food, to not worry that your children will be harmed, to have work in order to make a living – all these good gifts of God can restore peace to people who have no other options for peace.

As you take up this task, recall Mary’s song about God’s upside-down way of bringing peace to the world: “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:51-53).

Prayer: Prince of Peace, make us peacemakers who long for justice. Where refugees have been injured because of war, civil strife, and hatred, use us to bring peace. Thank you that you will faithfully direct us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

#15. Joy on the Journey (Read Ephesians 1:15-23)

The book of Proverbs is full of wisdom that encapsulates both God’s truth and an accurate picture of human existence. One proverb states, “There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace” (Proverbs 12:20).

As you reflect on pursuing peace by sponsoring and resettling refugees, it is helpful to contemplate the psalmist’s words: “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10). What does the psalmist mean? He is giving us an astounding image of God’s merciful dealings with his covenant people. God poured out his love, faithfulness, peace, and righteousness on his children. You are his children. You have received these gifts from him. As his image bearers, you want to pass these gifts on to others, generously extending love, faithfulness, right relationships, and peace to all people, including refugees. God delights in your faithful, joyful response.

All the while, his faithful power will uphold you. That power “is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:19b-21). What amazing power is available to you as you pursue your calling to love and care for refugees! What incredible joy will be yours as you promote peace on their behalf!

Prayer: Lord of perfect love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace, fill us with resurrection joy and power as we care for the refugees you have brought to us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

#16. Faithful Interceding High Priest (Read Romans 8:31-39)

Enthroned at the right hand of God, Jesus – the Prince of Peace and High Priest – is always interceding for you. How can that knowledge comfort you as you obey his call to care for refugees?

There is no one who knows the needs of refugees like Jesus does. And there is no one who knows your needs like he does. He knows refugees through and through, and nothing about you is hidden from his sight. Add to that the fact that he prays perfectly for both them and you. He only asks the Father for things that are according to his will and that will bring him glory. So, anything he prays for refugees and you will ultimately be for your communal good and will point to God.

During the sponsorship period, you will probably face problems that seem insurmountable. But don't be discouraged. Allow the truth of Hebrews 4:14-16 to set your hearts at rest: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for faithfully interceding for us as we undertake this refugee sponsorship. What comfort we experience when we consider your perfect prayers for us and the refugees we are sponsoring. In Jesus' name, amen.

#17. Be Faithful in Prayer (Read Romans 12:9-21)

Faithful prayer is the necessary foundation for being peacemakers who pass on the peace of Christ to refugees so that they can thrive in peace. Asking God for strength, wisdom, perseverance, love, energy, and patience is necessary for the task. Faithful prayer acknowledges that Jesus is the vine and that you are the branches. It confesses that, in him, you will bear much fruit and that apart from him you can do nothing (John 15:5).

When you seek the faithful Creator through prayer, you will be equipped for every need and circumstance because seeking him is not a hit-or-miss affair – "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Sponsoring refugees isn't always a comfortable and enjoyable experience. Sometimes it can be very challenging. You might have misunderstandings due to different cultures and languages. You might not agree with the refugees that you welcomed about how funds should be responsibly spent or about the adequacy of the housing you have acquired for them. Maybe the refugees will demand more time and energy of you than you can reasonably manage. Perhaps personality clashes that you never counted on, despite your best efforts, will create tension and disharmony.

For all these reasons and more besides, faithful prayer is essential – not just prayer at the beginning and ending of your refugee committee meetings, but daily prayers for the refugee family. Keep your eyes fixed on the Prince of Peace. Bring all your needs to him. He will not disappoint you.

Prayer: Dear God, we realize that when we sponsor refugees, we don't know what we are getting into and we can't predict outcomes. However, we know we can pray to you at any time about anything. How comforting that is! Keep us faithful in prayer. In Jesus' name, amen.

#18. The Kingdom of Righteousness (Read Isaiah 32:1-8; 17-18)

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke about the fulfillment of the kingdom of righteousness: “My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (Isaiah 32:18).

For years, the refugees you are sponsoring might have lived in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, and in undisturbed places of rest. Then peace fled when war came. Rest vanished. Unrest prevailed. They escaped from their once-secure homes, and crossed borders in search of safety, arriving in refugee camps or other safe places.

Each refugee has a story to tell. God knows each one, including the stories of the refugees you are sponsoring. You might never know their complete stories, but you can imagine the ache of their hardship as they fled their country, possibly terrified of the present and afraid of the future. They might have suffered hunger, danger, violence, and trauma completely outside of your realm of experience.

More important than their personal story is God's story. He is faithfully bringing about the kingdom of righteousness in their lives. And, praise be to God, he is using you to do it! You have believed that “the Lord watches over the alien” (Psalm 146:9). Not only that, in obedience to God, you have made yourself available to concretely work toward the fulfillment of the kingdom of righteousness in refugees' lives.

Prayer: God of righteousness, we long to see your kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven. We are amazed at your faithfulness that embraces refugees and us – undeserving, yet loved beyond measure. Help us to act justly and faithfully in all our dealings with our sponsored family. In Jesus' name, amen.

#19. An Eternal Refrain (Read Psalm 136)

Over and over the refrain – “His love endures forever” – resounds throughout Psalm 136. It’s as if the psalmist can’t get enough of proclaiming the faithful love of God that sustained all things from the creation of the world, to the exodus from Egypt, and to the era of the biblical kings. That Love, which knows no bounds, remembers people in their neediness, frees them from enemies, and provides food to all.

The psalmist spoke of God’s unending love even before Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Imagine if he were alive today. He would be able to add verse after verse proclaiming the ongoing actions of God propelled by his abiding love.

You can do the same. For some time now you have been caring for refugees. God’s faithful love which endures forever has framed your entire experience. What verses could you write as a testimony to that truth? Perhaps they might sound like this:

“Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of justice, faithfulness, and compassion.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to God who is a shelter for oppressed refugees:

His love endures forever.

who gave them housing, food, clothing, finances, and employment.

His love endures forever.

who provided medical care for them.

His love endures forever.

who dried their tears when they were homesick.

His love endures forever.

who brought them into a loving community.

His love endures forever.”

Prayer: Dear God, we will never be able to totally grasp your love for refugees and us till we see you face to face. Help us to hear the unceasing refrain of your love as you bring it to fruition in our lives. In Jesus’ name, amen.

#20. Ending With God (Read Philippians 1:3-11)

These devotionals began with a reflection on the truth that the work you are doing for refugees was God's idea first and foremost. What a consolation that is! But even more comforting is the knowledge "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Again, you are reminded that everything begins, carries on, and ends in Christ.

Not only does God promise that he will bring to completion what he has begun in you, he assures you that he "is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24). Let your response to his abiding faithfulness reflect Jude's praise: "to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 25).

Prayer: Dear Lord, throughout this sponsorship journey, we have witnessed your eternal faithfulness. You have never let us down or disappointed us. Thank you for allowing us to serve you by caring for refugees. In Jesus' name, amen.

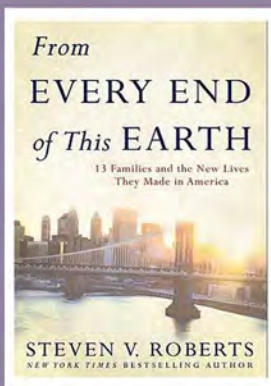
- Devotionals written by Sonya Vanderveen Feddema



Learn & Grow

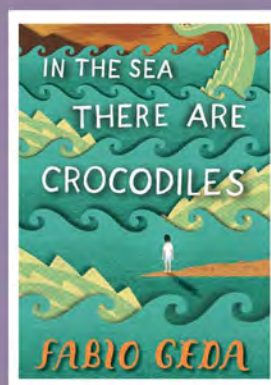
A book list for understanding the refugee experience

Becoming informed about the reasons why people became refugees and what they faced before they arrived in your community will help you serve them better. The following resources will both inform you about the plight of refugees and motivate you as you help them to settle in Canada.



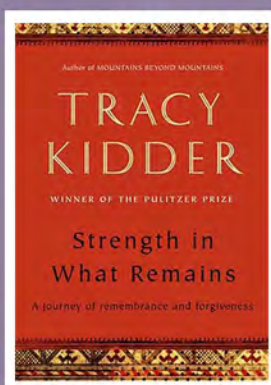
1. *From Every End of This Earth: 13 Families and the New Lives They Made in America by Steven V. Roberts (Harper, 2009)

At a time when immigration is a hot topic, Roberts celebrates the strength, character, and contributions of newcomers. He shares the stories of 13 families consisting of professionals, international entrepreneurs, survivors of war and genocide, and business owners. As he relates their painful experiences before and after coming to America, he convincingly argues that “these immigrants are like the sun and the rain to America; they replenish our soil and spirit.”



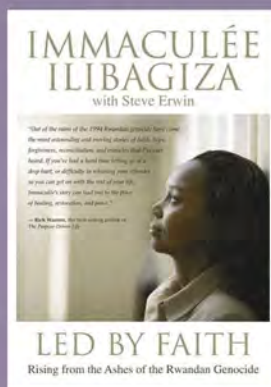
2. *In the Sea There are Crocodiles: The Story of Enaiatollah Akbari by Fabio Geda (Harvill Secker, 2011).

Ten year-old Enaiatollah Akbari and his mother fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan because of threats to sell the boy into slavery. While he slept, his mother returned to her other children in Afghanistan. Alone, Enaiatollah struggled to survive. In a journey that included traversing mountains, hiding in the fake bottom of a truck, and riding in a rubber dinghy, Enaiatollah crossed Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Greece, and finally arrived in Italy where he was granted asylum. His story, magnificently rendered in Fabio Geda's lyrical voice, is essential reading for all who wish to understand the plight of refugees.



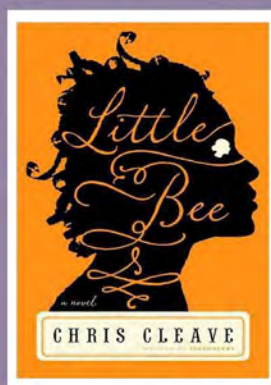
3. ***Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness** by Tracy Kidder (Random House, 2009)

A Burundian Tutsi who escaped genocides in both his native land and Rwanda, Deo arrives in New York City and ekes out a living in a place that made him feel “you were simply not a human being” (pp. 32). Contact with a church community eventually led him to caring people who assisted him in returning to university, to medical school, and, finally, to Burundi to build a clinic. By turns horrifying and hopeful, Deo's story is a testimony to God's providential care in his life.



4. ***Led by Faith: Rising From the Ashes of the Rwandan Genocide** by Immaculee Ilibagiza with Steve Erwin (Hay House, 2008)

In her sequel to *Left to Tell*, Immaculee Ilibagiza, Tutsi survivor of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and refugee to the U.S., shares “deeply personal experiences and memories connecting and highlighting the events that most profoundly influenced my spiritual growth” (pp. xvi). Warning Christians never to take faith for granted, she worries that Rwandans will reject God because of the genocide. Having personally visited and forgiven her family's murderer, she has devoted her life to proclaiming God's forgiveness as the only path to Rwanda's healing.



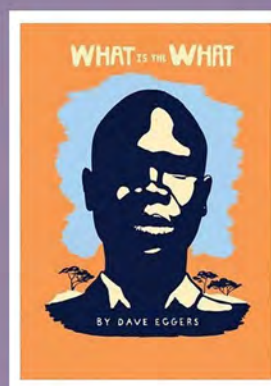
5. ***Little Bee** by Chris Cleave (DoubleDay)

In this searing indictment of Britain's immigration removal centers and treatment of refugees, Cleave gives readers an unforgettable character in Little Bee, a Nigerian asylum seeker. Caught between her homeland's violence and a democracy's inhumane treatment, Little Bee does what she needs to in order to save herself and those whom she loves. By turns despairing and hopeful, this challenging novel – containing violence, profanity, and sexually explicit scenes which accurately portray what refugees endure – offers profound insights into the lives of “floating people” (pp. 80).



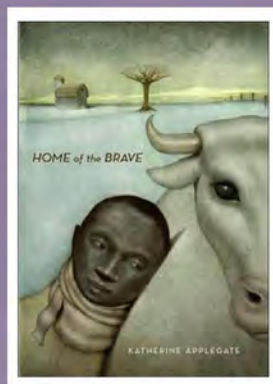
6. *The Day of the Pelican by Katherine Paterson (Clarion Books, 2009)

In 1998, thirteen-year-old Meli Lleshi and her family, who are Muslim Albanians living in Kosovo, flee their Serbian oppressors. They become refugees and are eventually sponsored by a church in Vermont. Baba, Meli's father, teaches his children that "hate makes no sense" (pp. 88). As Meli witnesses atrocities in her homeland, on the run, and in America, she struggles to fight her growing hatred. Paterson's informative, sensitive juvenile novel deals in an age-appropriate manner with the violence war inflicts on millions of children.



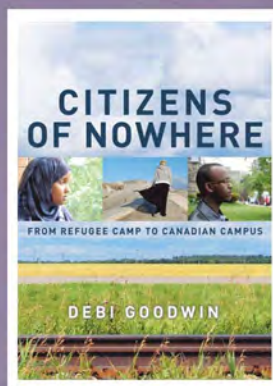
7. What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng by Dave Eggers (McSweeney's, 2006)

Valentino Achek Deng fled Sudan in the mid-1980s due to the raging civil war. He joined thousands of other boys – later known as the Lost Boys – as he sought refuge in Ethiopia and, later, in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp. From there he was resettled in the U.S., hoping for a better life. Resettlement brought many new challenges which Valentino faced courageously.



8. **Home of the Brave** by Katherine Applegate (Feiwel and Friends, 2007)

In this moving juvenile novel, Kek, a refugee from Africa adjusts to life in America. Separated from his mother, Kek longs to see her again, even as he makes new friends, learns to laugh at his cultural blunders, and struggles to adjust to new circumstances. Though written for children ages 9-12, this book is relevant for all ages as it portrays the refugee resettlement experience through the eyes of a child.



9. **Citizens of Nowhere: From Refugee Camp to Canadian Campus** by Debi Goodwin (Doubleday Canada, 2010)

Debi Goodwin, a documentary producer and a former CBC journalist, visited Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya in 2008. During the next year, she documented the lives of eleven refugees who had received sponsorships from Canadian universities through the World University Service of Canada program. She relates what they experienced in the refugee camp and in their adjustment to a new culture, climate, and community.

By Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

(Book reviews marked with asterisks written by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema and previously published in The Banner. Used with permission.)

Refugee Sponsorship

A Doorway to Blessed Multicultural Relationships

By Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When Mary* turned one year old, her proud parents, Laurier and Desiree, invited guests to their apartment to celebrate this milestone in their second child's life. As the visitors, adults and children from various backgrounds - Rwandans, Sudanese, Americans, and Canadians - arrived, hugs and greetings were exchanged between old friends and handshakes between new ones. Gifts of food filled the table and presents for Mary piled up on the floor. The children cavorted through the apartment, from the living room to the bedrooms and back again, holding hands, dancing, shrieking, and laughing, while the adults talked and finished the preparations for the meal.

As I watched the energetic, festive scene, I was overcome by a sense of holy awe as I remembered the Book of Revelation's inspiring vision - "All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (Revelations 15:4b). This birthday party was a foretaste of that perfect, future reality. Also, it was a special birthday because an arduous, traumatic journey had taken place to arrive at that day.

Laurier and Desiree, both in their early 30s, had arrived in Canada two and a half years earlier along with their first child, Estelle. Our church community, Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, had sponsored the Rwandans who had separately fled their homeland during the 1994 genocide when they were teenagers. Several years and countries later, during which they had met and married, they arrived in South Africa. God answered their prayers for a new home and country, as well as our refugee committee's prayers for guidance as to which family profile to choose to sponsor. God gave us to each other as gifts for his glory.

Refugee sponsorship is a doorway to blessed multicultural relationships. When refugee sponsorship is based on a desire to do God's will by caring for the oppressed, it becomes an avenue for experiencing the joy - though only in part, "for now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12a, KJV) - of what it will be like when all nations and peoples live in harmony in the new heaven and earth.

(continued on next page)

Relationships will then be as they were originally intended to be – joyful, pleasurable, loving, and God glorifying – for even now, as we await the fulfilment of that time, we know that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galations 3:28).

Laurier, Desiree, their children, and other refugees our church community have sponsored have taught me so much. My world is bigger now because of them. The Rwandan genocide isn't just a distant, abstract event written about by Romeo Dallaire in *Shake Hands With the Devil*. It was the defining moment in Rwanda's history that brought Laurier and Desiree into my life and the lives of many others here in Canada. When I think of what these two young people experienced – fleeing their homeland, losing family members in violent ways, moving from country to country, and finally making the transition to life in Canada – I am humbled by God's grace and their courage. Their presence in my life has heightened my awareness of the freedom I have in Canada, freedom which includes the chance to meet and enjoy people who are different from me.

An old Celtic saying states, “We live in the shelter of each other.” That shelter is found not only amongst our “own kind,” people with similar eating habits, skin color, ways of thinking, and manners of dress, but also in the shelter of others who are very different from us. It is a shelter in which we can explore our differences, taste each other's food, cuddle each other's children, cry and laugh with each other, dispel our false notions about each other, and worship God together.

As I write, the refugee committee of my church community is preparing for the arrival of an extended family of eight Columbians. Obviously, the ensuing multicultural journey will be different from the one with Laurier and Desiree because Columbia is not Rwanda. And, yet, it will be similar. God is giving us to each other as gifts for his glory.

*Please note that all names have been changed.



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