

# A New Ministry and the Face in the Mirror

*Duncan Garrow*

When exactly did it start? Was it the “sunny ways” of a new government in Ottawa? Or the heartbreaking sight of a three year old boy washed ashore on a Turkish beach? Or maybe it was the face in the mirror reminding us, beckoning us, demanding of us, to do more.

Without knowing exactly what “more” would entail, a group gathered in the parish hall in October determined to find out. The idea of sponsoring a refugee family had been floated in June, and by fall the Board of Management and Advisory Board had given permission to explore the appetite of the parish for this ministry. Initial information meetings were well attended and volunteers emerged. Given this strong interest, a small group developed a proposal for the Board of Management, the Advisory Board and the Stewardship Committee. Could we test the waters by asking for pledges in 2016 – 2017? How would this new ministry work? Where would the money come from? And how much of it would we need exactly? Who were we hoping to attract as potential sponsorship candidates? And who would sort out the logistics and perform the leg work once the family arrived? So many questions. And only one certainty. The face in the mirror.

With approval to take the next steps, we formed the Refugee Settlement Committee or RSC for short. The now 16 active members of the RSC is part of a larger group of more than 60 who have expressed an interest in getting involved once the refugees have arrived. The RSC includes four people who have led or been involved in settlements of two families in the past four years; two Jewish members; and several others from outside the parish.

The original proposal, under the auspices of AURA, the Anglican United Refugee Alliance, estimated the cost of bringing one family of four to Canada to be \$40,000 dollars for one full year. This includes, among other things: rent and utilities, groceries, clothing, TTC fare and even the cost of their travel to Canada. Everything a family would need to live during the cru-

cial first year of adjusting to a new country. After that initial year, the family would assume financial responsibility for themselves.

The generous response to the RSC’s request for support has been truly humbling; we have topped \$100,000 in pledges and donations. We have received support from a wide variety of parishioners at the Redeemer, and from those with no previous connection to the church. Thank you for your enthusiasm and your sacrifice. As the intent of this ministry is to be ongoing, should the program be approved by vestry, any outstanding donations will go toward sponsoring a second and eventually a third family in the coming months and years. And any money raised to date, or going forward, will be kept completely separate from money raised for other church ministries.

It was unanimously agreed that though we’ve all been incredibly moved by the situation in Syria, and as honoured as we would be to sponsor a Syrian family, that excluding anyone simply because they aren’t Syrian would defeat the whole intent of this ministry of hospitality. In fact, public attention can be a fickle thing, and as the world turns a sympathetic eye to Syria, countless displaced families and individuals around the world continue to wait and hope for a better tomorrow.

The committee is following AURA and diocesan requirements with regards to police checks, sexual misconduct training and training specific for anyone who will be directly involved with the arriving refugees. And various roles, the pots and pans of everyday life and resettlement, continue to be defined within the group.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it certainly takes an entire parish, and indeed an entire community, to sponsor a refugee family. Most of us will never understand the horror that refugees endure, or the courage it takes to leave the shattered remains of a broken life, with only hope and faith that a new one can be better. But we can all appreciate the power of a warm embrace, and a hand extended with love and compassion. And we can all appreciate how good it feels to smile at the face in the mirror.

The motion to approve the work of the Refugee Settlement Committee will be presented at Vestry. Members of the committee will be available at the pre-Vestry meetings to answer any questions that parishioners may have.

*Duncan is a member of the Redeemer community and engaged in the work of the Refugee Settlement Committee and the Amnesty Action Circle.*