

Refugee Committee

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Refugee News

St. Bartholomew's

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After accounting for the funding for our first refugee family and for donations St Bart's has made to other refugee activities, we have \$15,000 of the required \$30,000 to put toward the sponsorship of this second group of refugees. If you have not yet made a donation and would still like to, this is your opportunity. The diocese has indicated that it would be willing, however, to help us find a source of funds if St Bart's falls short of raising the full amount.

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The war in Syria has affected people from all walks of life.

Whether a family had a comfortable middle class life in Syria is not relevant in determining if they are refugees or not. The war and violence are indiscriminate. There are so many deserving cases from Syria that it is difficult to select which families to sponsor.

We were fortunate to have learned about the family that we are sponsoring through family connections and other churches here in Ottawa. There are several branches of this family that other churches in Ottawa are sponsoring. The UNHCR and the Canadian government continue to stress the importance of family reunification in successfully resettling refugees. We are doing our part.

While the usual processing time for applications still suggests an early 2017 arrival, accelerated processing could lead to an earlier arrival, and we will be ramping up our planning and organizing activities in the coming weeks to ensure we are well prepared. We look forward to welcoming this family and feel privileged and honoured to be in a position to offer them a new life in a safe and supportive environment.

The parishioners of St. Bart's have been very generous and have raised sufficient funds to allow for another sponsorship. We will be sponsoring a second family that has a connection to the family described above. We will provide the church with more information once we have more details.

News from the Refugee Committee

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The sponsorship application for our Syrian refugee family is at the central processing office in Winnipeg. The Committee thought this might be a good time to share some background information on the situation of refugees from Syria in general, and provide some context regarding the particular circumstances of the family we are applying to sponsor, bearing in mind the family's personal details are protected by the Privacy Act.

A refugee is a person with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, political beliefs, membership in a particular social group or nationality, who has left his/her country of origin in search of protection. In the case of Syria, the majority of refugees have fled because of the conflict and violence resulting from civil war which has been further complicated by the subsequent involvement of radical armed groups. Some minority groups, such as the Christians, have experienced additional persecution.

Although there are many people who have made the dangerous journey to Europe in search of asylum, Canada is not resettling these refugees. As signatories to the refugee Convention, European countries are obligated to protect refugees on their territory. Although great numbers of refugee claimants have

flooded into Europe in a short time, most of those who have fled Syria are actually in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Those “countries of asylum” are providing protection to the Syrian refugees in spite of the huge burden. The Syrian refugees being re-settled by Canada come from the millions currently sheltering in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

The family of five that we are supporting is currently living precariously in Lebanon. Lebanon, which has a population of just over 4.5 million, is hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees! Lebanon welcomed Syrian refugees from the outset because Syria had hosted Lebanese refugees through a number of past Lebanese conflicts. Furthermore Christian refugees leaving Syria have generally favoured Lebanon as a country of asylum because Lebanon has a large Christian population. But the situation there is not easy. Tensions have been rising as the strain of coping with the influx of over a million refugees combines with a reduction of aid from the UN. Lebanon has not created refugee camps for Syrians as a result of its difficult past experience in offering this form of protection to Palestinians. So refugees in Lebanon are generally in community situations where the capacity to provide for the basic needs of refugees is now stretched to the breaking point. Refugees additionally are facing discrimination, for example in seeking employment and school spaces for their children (additionally complicated because schooling in Lebanon takes place partially in French.)

The family of five our congregation is supporting was living a middle class existence in Syria when the civil war broke out. The father was employed in a medical/laboratory-related industry. When the conflict moved to their region in 2011, they sought protection by moving to another Syrian city as displaced persons. They were able to re-settle in rental accommodation and the father was able to find work in his field. However, in 2013 the conflict spread to the area in which they had resettled which was targeted by rocket fire. So in October of 2013 the family moved again to a small city dominated by displaced Christians, where the father found employment as an agrarian worker. A year later, he was kidnapped and beaten – targeted as a result of his Christian background. The police made clear they hadn't the resources to protect the family given the generally worsening security situation. In early 2015, the family fled Syria for Lebanon in search of protection.

While the family is safer in Lebanon than in Syria, as Syrian refugees they face discrimination. The father has not been able to find work. The three children are not going to school. Over the past five years, the family has been displaced three times in search of safety; they are on the verge of using up what little remains of their own resources and they feel unsafe and unwanted in Lebanon. UN agencies and community groups have been providing for basic needs while the family awaits consideration of their resettlement application.