

## INTRODUCTION

Why should a congregation become involved in refugee resettlement? As people of God, we are mandated by the Scriptures “to welcome the stranger into our homes, to love the alien as ourselves, and to hide the refugee!”

There are many ways that congregations can become involved in this important ministry. We hope your congregation will give prayerful consideration to sponsoring a refugee or refugee family by providing a new home to those who have been forced to flee from their homes. However, if sponsorship is not possible at this time, you will find suggestions in this manual of other ways you can become involved in this life-giving ministry.

American Baptist Churches USA—through the Office of Immigration and Refugee Services program of American Baptist Home Mission Societies—resettles refugees in areas of the United States where the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) has affiliate offices. For the address of the affiliate near you, contact our office by phone or e-mail (see below). CWS/IRP staff will be glad to meet with your congregation to explain sponsorship and to provide detailed information about the resettlement process. If your church decides to sponsor a refugee or refugee family, the affiliate will conduct a training session. Staff also are available for assistance should any problem arise after the arrival of the refugee(s).

Additionally, please remember that American Baptist Home Mission Societies Office of Immigration and Refugee Services staff are just a phone call away, and we welcome your input. We value our relationship with local church sponsors and look forward to receiving your stories and pictures about the resettlement of sponsored refugees to share with other American Baptist congregations.

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## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST REFUGEE PROGRAM**

From 1919-1947, the “foreign-born” arriving in the United States were aided in their transition to life in a new country by the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society’s Department of Christian Americanization. (The department was renamed in 1936 as the Department of Christian Friendliness, in 1963 as the Community Witness Program, and in 1969 as the Parish Witness Program.)

In 1946, a number of Protestant denominations in the United States—including the Northern Baptist Convention, the predecessor of American Baptist Churches USA—came together to form Church World Service as a means to respond ecumenically to the needs of the millions of displaced persons in Europe following World War II. Relief efforts, refugee resettlement, and later development projects were part of that response. Then in 1948, Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act, the first important refugee legislation in U.S. history. It provided the legislative framework for the resettlement of large numbers of displaced in the United States. The first family to be resettled in 1948 was from Latvia.

According to a report dated May 24, 1960, from Matthew R. Giuffrida, who was field representative for the Department of Christian Friendliness, 4,000 displaced persons (mainly from the Baltic countries) were resettled under the auspices of American Baptists between 1948 and 1952. Four hundred of these persons were considered “hard core,” or difficult to place, under the provisions of the Displaced Persons Act. These numbers take on a particular significance when viewed in the context of the provisions of the Act. It contained a requirement that each refugee individual or family have a sponsor who would guarantee transportation costs from port of entry, provide a place to live, and assist in finding employment.

To facilitate the process, the American Baptist Home Mission Society agreed to provide “blanket assurances” to Church World Service for a large number of refugees with the understanding that the society would secure individual assurances later. The initial blanket assurance involved 1,200 refugees. With the cooperation of American Baptist state and city judicatories, as well as local churches, all the individual assurances were subsequently secured.

In 1982, the American Baptist Churches General Board adopted a policy, which states that the denomination “shall continue our historical role as an advocate of human rights for immigrants, refugees and migrants; continue our historical role in resettlement of refugees and immigrants; continue to cooperate with Church World Service...in the servicing and resettlement of refugees; [and] engage in holistic ministry to immigrants, refugees, migrants and overstayed and undocumented persons.”

Since the end of World War II, American Baptists have been in the forefront of resettling refugees from many different countries. Crises in Hungary, Cuba, Vietnam, the Middle East,

Sudan, Somalia, and, most recently, Burma and Bhutan have contributed to a steady flow of refugees. The denomination's resettlement ministry continues to be coordinated by The American Baptist Home Mission Society, known today as American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

## **WHO ARE REFUGEES AND HOW DO THEY COME TO THE UNITED STATES?**

### **Refugee**

The word *refugee* is often confusing because people use the word when talking about different groups of people—foreigners, immigrants, persons displaced in their own country, and migrants. However, the U.S. resettlement program maintains a specific definition of a refugee. The United States Refugee Act of 1980 adopted the United Nations' definition of a refugee as a "person with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group." Only those people who are fleeing persecution are eligible for resettlement in the United States. Persons already living in the United States, who also might fit this description, cannot be resettled as refugees, but they may apply for asylum. If granted asylum, they receive the same rights as refugees.

### **Refugee admissions**

How does the United States decide how many and who will be resettled? Each year, the White House and Congress agree on the maximum number of refugees to be resettled during the following year.

If a person is accepted for resettlement in the United States by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the person's biographical information is sent to the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) in Arlington, Va., which is operated by the U.S. Department of State. The various U.S. resettlement agencies—one of which is Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP)—meet weekly at the center to receive the pending refugee cases allocated by the RPC and then assign the cases to their member denominations (one of which is the American Baptist Churches) or affiliates. The Office of Immigration and Refugee Services and staff of American Baptist Home Mission Societies work with CWS/IRP affiliates across the country to find sponsors for the cases assigned to American Baptist Churches USA.

### **Sponsorship**

If your congregation decides to sponsor a refugee or refugee family, the Office of Immigration and Refugee Services staff will share with you the biographical information we have received. After you sign a "Sponsorship Commitment" form, we will notify CWS/IRP that we accept this case for resettlement with you as the sponsor. CWS/IRP will "assure" the case with the RPC which then notifies the appropriate overseas office that a sponsor is ready to receive the refugee(s).

Once refugees have passed medical exams and security clearances, they are scheduled for flights to the United States. Transportation costs are paid through a loan from the International Organization for Migration. CWS/IRP acts as the collection agent for repayment of that loan and sets up a repayment schedule to fit the refugees' financial situation.

The CWS/IRP affiliate calls sponsors to let them know when to expect the refugee to arrive in the United States.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPONSORSHIP

ABHMS' Office of Immigration and Refugee Services, on behalf of American Baptist Churches USA, actively maintains an extensive ministry of resettlement assistance for persons displaced from home and country and gives priority to this vital mission.

As indicated earlier in this manual, refugee cases registered for resettlement in the United States are referred to our denomination by the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP). Persons, churches (or classes or committees in churches), clusters of churches, and associations are accepted as sponsors of individual refugees and refugee families. The main responsibilities assumed in a resettlement project are to do the following:

- work in cooperation with the local CWS/IIRP affiliate;
- welcome the refugee(s) at the airport upon arrival;
- provide decent, safe housing (furnished rooms or apartment);
- assist the breadwinner in obtaining suitable employment;
- provide transportation to job interviews and medical appointments;
- donate furnishings and household items; and
- provide daily maintenance until the refugee(s) become self-sustaining (usually after the first or second paycheck is received).

Please remember that the refugees you sponsor are survivors, who have fled from their homes and navigated many obstacles to be accepted for resettlement in the United States. It is important to treat them with dignity and respect. You are dealing with adults who are fully capable of making their own decisions (including their own mistakes). Your responsibility is to inform and assist them in becoming self-sufficient in as short a time as reasonable.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How much will it cost?**

The answer to this question depends on the congregation's geographical location and the background of the refugee(s). If rent in an area is relatively high, it will cost more for a congregation to provide adequate housing. Language skills are also a variable. Those more fluent in English will face fewer hurdles in finding employment, thereby reaching a state of self-sufficiency more quickly.

We recommend that sponsors plan a budget for at least three months. In some cases, the head of the household will find a job in less time; in other cases, more time is needed. We expect sponsors to allow refugees a week or so to rest, but then sponsors should assist in finding employment as soon as possible. Occasionally, for various reasons, refugees are slow to take the initiative to become self-sufficient. In those circumstances, it is necessary for sponsors to slowly reduce financial involvement so refugees understand that sponsorship is not a long-term commitment.

Sponsors are not legally responsible for any debts or bills incurred by refugees. However, sponsors should provide assistance in understanding U.S. money and banking systems. When discussing how to acquire credit, it is important to stress the possible pitfalls involved.

### **Are there any funds to help us?**

CWS/IRP affiliates provide a resettlement grant for each case they resettle. That grant is based on the number of people in the case. Contact your CWS/IRP affiliate to learn how much they will provide to help you with sponsorship expenses. The CWS/IRP grant is to be used toward initial reception and housing costs, or for future needs as determined by sponsors and refugees together. These funds are made possible by the U.S. government and American Baptist Churches USA support of Church World Service.

Emergency assistance grants are available from our denomination on a case-by-case basis. Where there is a strong desire on the part of a congregation to sponsor a refugee but adequate funds are lacking, the Office of Immigration and Refugee Services is willing to lend support.

### **Who pays for refugees to come to the United States?**

Sponsors are *not* responsible for the transportation costs of bringing refugees to the United States. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) pays for this transportation from a revolving fund. Refugees are responsible to repay IOM over a period of time, without interest. Church World Service bills refugees for the repayment of their IOM loan and must report delinquent loans to a credit reporting agency.

Delinquency could result in future credit being impaired. Refugees who are having financial difficulties can arrange to repay their loans with only a few dollars a month and thus avoid harm to their credit rating. In exceptional situations of hardship, loan repayment can be forgiven.

**When can we expect their arrival?**

The response to this question depends on what country the refugee is coming from and the processing logistics in that country. Once a congregation agrees to sponsor a refugee, it might be as little as two weeks or as long as six months before arrival. Estimated arrival dates will be provided but are not always accurate, and extenuating circumstances often delay arrival. Expect the unexpected, and be prepared for any circumstances.

**How long are we responsible?**

The U.S. State Department requires CWS/IRP to ensure that refugees are provided the basic care of housing, food, and other essentials for the first 90 days after arrival. This requirement, however, does not involve a legal obligation on the part of the congregations that agree to sponsor a refugee. Some refugees become self-sufficient very soon after arrival; others take more time. Congregations should be generous in providing for refugees but should not fall into a pattern in which refugees expect long-term care. The goal is for refugees to become independent.

If refugees choose to move from the community, sponsoring congregations are no longer responsible. Sponsors should notify either the CWS/IRP affiliate or the American Baptist Immigration and Refugee Program of the move and the new address, if it is known.

**What if problems arise after arrival?**

Most sponsorships are great successes, and help is not needed. Should any problems arise, the CWS/IRP affiliate is available to help. CWS/IRP staff is familiar with agencies that can provide needed services, such as job training, medical care, English language training, mental health care, and legal assistance. In addition, sponsors are encouraged to call the Office of Immigration and Refugee Services at 1-800-222-3872, ext. 2450.

## IF YOUR CONGREGATION DECIDES TO SPONSOR

We are very happy that your congregation has decided to “welcome the stranger.” The staff at the Office of Immigration and Refugee Services are only a telephone call away!  
(See contact information on page 1.)

The Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) affiliate in your area can provide detailed information on refugee sponsorship.

There are several different models of sponsorship for your congregation to consider:

- A **Full Sponsorship**—a congregation is paired with a refugee or refugee family, usually a “free case” (no relatives in the United States and therefore free to be resettled anywhere in the United States within 50 miles of a CWS affiliate).
- One type of **Co-Sponsorship** — two congregations join in sponsoring a refugee or refugee family. These may be two American Baptist congregations, or one American Baptist congregation and a congregation from another denomination.
- A second type of **Co-Sponsorship** — a congregation is paired with the relative of a family in a reunification refugee case (when the relative lives in your community).
- One type of **Cluster Sponsorship** — several American Baptist congregations join in sponsoring a refugee or refugee family.
- A second type of **Cluster Sponsorship** — an ecumenical group of churches join in sponsoring a refugee or refugee family.

If several congregations join in sponsoring a refugee or refugee family, it is best if one congregation becomes the “lead” congregation and others help in specific areas, such as providing funds, furnishing one room of the apartment, or providing transportation.

### **The Resettlement Plan**

Your local CWS/IRP affiliate will work with you on a Resettlement Plan, as required by the U.S. State Department, which shows you how to meet the needs of the refugee, defines your responsibilities, and lists the resources available in your community.

## HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR CONGREGATION

Each congregation is unique and will have its own ideas about how to organize and handle refugee sponsorship. It is extremely important that the involvement of those participating in this ministry show love and concern for the refugees. They should be people with whom the refugees can share joys and concerns and seek assistance in a crisis.

Congregations have a diversity of resources that make them especially well-equipped to respond to this mission project. Some members are best at meeting the immediate physical needs of the refugees, while others are able to seek initial job opportunities. Still others can provide the close emotional and spiritual support helpful to refugees as they become an integral part of the community.

Participation and support by 100% of the congregation is not necessary and, realistically, is not always possible. What is needed most is one or more committees or task forces that can organize the members' involvement. It is helpful to form a small core to be responsible for direct contact with the refugee(s). This group should include several "good listeners." A broader support group will be needed to handle the practical aspects of resettlement, such as housing, employment, medical check-ups, transportation, and schooling. This group should contain people who are familiar with the resources of the community.

Although many preparations for the refugees can be made in advance, it will be impossible to work out some details until after they arrive. It is a good idea to brainstorm potential issues, needs, or concerns that may arise, and prepare a response. Being proactive will make for a smoother transition.

A well-organized congregation can reduce the costs of sponsorship by tapping their church and community resources for donations of goods and services. Beyond the advantages of financial savings, a broad organizational plan will provide refugees with emotional support that will continue long after they have reached self-sufficiency. Broader contacts in the community beyond the congregation can be implemented in a variety of ways—through the church newsletter and community newspapers, co-operative efforts with neighboring congregations, and church members' business and social connections.



## MEETING THE PLANE

The CWS/IRP affiliate will call sponsors a few days before arrival to let you know when the refugees are expected. From time to time, refugees do not arrive as scheduled. Sometimes there is a medical problem that delays the arrival, or the refugees have a relative in another U.S. state that they want to join. Sometimes they change their minds and decide not to come at all. This is why it is important that you are prepared with temporary housing, and do not sign a lease until the refugees have actually arrived.

Prior to the refugees' arrival, you will be called with details of the exact flight number and arrival time. Your responsibilities to the refugees begin with the arrival of the plane.

Although a few refugees feel overwhelmed if a large crowd meets them at the airport, the majority feel that they are really being welcomed and are assured that their needs will surely be met when many people greet them. We suggest that you consider inviting the following people to join you:

- Persons of the same nationality as the refugees. (This can serve the dual purpose of making the refugees feel that they are not entering a new culture totally alone and providing you with an interpreter.)
- Children in the congregation, especially if the refugee family has young children.
- Another Baptist congregation in your area. (This might provide the spark needed to get them interested in refugee sponsorship.)

Remember, the refugees will need to rest! They have probably flown through several time zones. Your day might be their night. They will be tired, confused, and slightly overwhelmed. It can take a week for their bodies to recover, so make your welcome short. Also remember that it may have been some time since they have eaten. Be prepared to provide them with culturally appropriate food for their first few hours in your community.

If it is winter, and especially if they are coming from a warm climate, be sure to have warm blankets and coats to help them with their first experience of winter in the United States. Also, be aware that some refugees may never have seen an escalator.

Some sponsoring congregations meet refugees with balloons, flowers, toys for the children, and big "welcome" signs in their native language. All of these help make refugees feel welcomed.

## THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Frequent visits during the first few weeks are very important. It is depressing to be alone in a strange town with no way to reach the people on whom you depend. Even if the refugees know how to reach you, they may not want to bother you with their questions or problems. When you visit, you will be able to observe how they are getting along. Please remember that some refugees may have experienced traumatic—even life threatening—situations. They will appreciate your support in this stressful time of adjustment.

Depending on the culture and class of society from which the refugees come, you may need to share with them some basic information during their first week here. Don't assume that sharing this information once is enough, especially if the refugees do not have a good understanding of English.

Explain:

- Emergency procedures for fires and accidents, including first aid supplies and a list of emergency phone numbers.
- The use of phones. Explain that long distance calls cost money and the monthly expense of a phone in their home.
- How to work the furnace, water heater, electricity, bathroom fixtures, and appliances.
- The importance of reading labels carefully. If a person cannot read English, cleansers, disinfectants, and some canned foods can look alike. Safety warnings are important. For example, when ammonia and Clorox are mixed, they form a dangerous gas.

Keep appliances at a minimum, but do provide a TV, which will be helpful in learning English. Putting labels on various items in the apartment also will help improve language skills.

Go shopping with the refugees so you can help with identifying foods, comparing prices, and making change with U.S. currency. In other countries, people often shop for food each day. Suggest planning menus and shopping once a week for cost savings.

## **CHURCH ATTENDANCE**

Church attendance by refugees can be a sensitive issue, especially if they have a faith tradition other than Christianity. You will want them to feel welcomed by your congregation, but not feel obligated to participate in worship or join your church.

After a period of initial rest, invite the refugees to a social church gathering, not as an invitation to join the church but to include them in the community. They will want to meet the people who are their sponsors. This one-on-one contact has the dual benefit of introducing the refugees to more members of your church and helping your congregation learn more about the people they are sponsoring.

Invite the refugees to come to your church whenever they want. However, the decision to participate in religious services must be their decision. You will want to respect their religious beliefs and provide assistance in locating others of their faith in your community.

It is, of course, natural to want to share your Christian faith and hope with refugees. If you wish to give a Bible or other Christian materials to a refugee, please ask permission first so you do not offend them. A variety of versions of the Bible in different languages are available from the American Bible Society at 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y., 10023; phone 212-408-1200.

## **IF YOUR CONGREGATION DECIDES NOT TO SPONSOR (BUT WANTS TO HELP IN OTHER WAYS)**

Although your congregation has decided not to sponsor a refugee at this time, we are happy that you want to be involved in refugee resettlement! We suggest the following ways of becoming involved:

**Provide Financial Support** — Money is a crucial ingredient in the resettlement of refugees, and there are many places that could use the financial support of your congregation. For example:

- ❖ another congregation in your area who wants to sponsor a refugee but lacks the financial resources it needs;
- ❖ a person in your community who wants to sponsor his/her refugee relative and may need financial help; and
- ❖ your local CWS/IRP program affiliate.

**Donate Welcome Baskets** — Most CWS/IRP affiliates can use various kinds of welcome baskets. Check with your local affiliate to find out what they can use, but consider the following:

- ❖ food basket (food appropriate to the nationality of the refugee);
- ❖ personal hygiene basket (soap, deodorant, toothpaste);
- ❖ linen basket (sheets, towels, pillows, blankets);
- ❖ kitchen basket (pans, dishes, glasses, silverware);
- ❖ toy basket (stuffed animals, coloring books, balls);
- ❖ school basket (paper, pencils, ruler, scissors, paste); and
- ❖ book basket (Bible in the refugee's language, children's books).

**Donate Household Goods** — Furniture, lamps, TVs, and other household goods are always needed by your local CWS/IRP affiliate. Check with them for the specific items they need and information on how you can get it to them when it is needed. Yard sales often have used furniture and other items at reasonable costs. Please only donate items in very good condition.

**Donate Storage Space** — Most CWS/IRP affiliates need a place to store donated items until they are needed.

**Invite a Refugee to Supper** — Person-to-person contact allows the refugee to know that there are persons in the community who welcome them.

**Host a Picnic** — Host a picnic for refugees of a certain nationality. Check with your CWS/IRP affiliate for suggestions on how to do this.

**Take a Refugee on an Excursion** — Your CWS/IRP affiliate can connect you with a refugee who would appreciate a trip to the zoo, museum, sporting event, or something as simple as grocery shopping.

**Teach English** — Individual tutors are needed because refugees often work during the hours that English classes are offered.

**Provide Child Care** — Often the women in the family do not learn English quickly because they have no one to stay with their children. Child care is greatly appreciated to enable women to attend English classes.

**Ask your Doctor or Dentist to help** — CWS/IRP affiliates need doctors and dentists who are willing to donate services to refugees.

**Help Your Affiliate Plan a Cultural Event** — Some CWS/IRP affiliates use cultural events as a fund-raising tool and others simply as a way to bring the community together. Volunteer to help organize an event that includes food, dancing, and music from the various cultures represented by the refugees and immigrants that live in your community.

**Serve on Your Affiliate's Board** — Each CWS/IRP affiliate has a board of directors or an advisory board that includes representatives from the denominations that resettle refugees through Church World Service. Check with your affiliate to see if they can use your help on their board.

**Become an Advocate for Refugees** — U.S. legislation often has a direct impact on the lives of refugees around the world. To learn how you can advocate for refugees, contact Jen Smyers, Washington Representative, CWS/IRP, 110 Maryland Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002. Her phone number is 202-481-6935 and her e-mail is [jsmyers@churchworldservice.org](mailto:jsmyers@churchworldservice.org).

**Offer Your Prayers** — Refugees around the world, refugees in your community, your local CWS/IRP affiliate, and the Immigration and Refugee Services Program of National Ministries all need your prayers.

