

Sponsorship Makes a Difference

You and your congregation can take part in making an important difference in the lives of refugees through sponsorship. The US Department of State Cooperative Agreement defines the term “local co-sponsor” as “a community group such as a church congregation, who has accepted, in a written agreement with the agency, to provide or ensure the provision of reception and placement services to certain refugees sponsored by an agency.”

Whether by donating a piece of furniture or by helping a refugee prepare for a job interview, members of sponsoring congregations help to provide invaluable assistance to those in need. Through this work, communities are enriched by the gifts newcomers bring with them and by the reward of seeing productive lives rebuilt.

What is a sponsor’s primary responsibility? Refugee sponsors have three general responsibilities. Sponsors act as guides, friends and advocates to those newly arrives in the US. In all cases, a sponsor’s overall goal is to assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient as soon as possible. A sponsoring congregation is asked to make a financial commitment of approximately **\$2,500** and to prepare for and provide **90 days** of hands-on care of the refugee family once they arrive.

As guides, sponsors play a key role in ensuring that refugees become self-sufficient. Sponsors supply initial food and clothing to refugees and arrange for housing. They introduce refugees to U.S. culture and acquaint them with important aspects of life in America. They encourage them to gain access to community services, including health care. They assist refugees with job applications, applications for Social Security cards, school registration and enrollment in English classes.

Most importantly, sponsors are **friends** to refugees. You will be among the first to welcome refugees into their new community and offer them emotional support and encouragement as they leave behind their homelands and adjust to U.S. culture. You will learn about and share in the cultural heritage of refugees and support the honoring of their customs and traditions. **As advocates**, you will act to ensure that the refugee family is not exploited, discriminated against or taken advantage of in the workplace or in their personal lives.

Helping refugees face the difficult challenges of adjustment to life in the U.S. and building a hospitable environment for their resettlement makes a world of difference for refugees trying to find a place they can call home. Only a small number of the world’s refugees ever have an opportunity to resettle in another country (less than 1% of the world refugee population annually). As Christians ministering to refugees we become instruments of God’s grace and love showing to refugees that the world is not a cold, merciless place but a world of warmth, compassion and love.

The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as the native among you, and you shall love him as you love yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

-Leviticus 19:34

To extend hospitality to refugees is part of the DNA of who we are as churches...

-Pastor Edgar S. Goins,
Wesley United Methodist
Church, Lexington KY

The neighbor was the Samaritan who approached the wounded man and made him his neighbor. The neighbor ...is not (the one) who I find in my path, but rather (the one) in whose path I place myself, (the one) whom I approach and actively seek.

-Gustavo Gutierrez, A
Theology of Liberation