

Partnership

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In mission for refugees

Moving is something with which Canadians are well familiar. According to the 2006 Census, nearly 60 percent of us were not living at the same address as we were five years earlier. Sometimes we move to take on or look for a new job. Sometimes it is to pursue higher education. Other times, it is to be closer to family and friends. In most instances, such moves are voluntary. We have a choice. Others are not so fortunate.

Around the globe, it is estimated that 43 million people are currently displaced from their homes and homelands. These are people who have been forced to migrate for their personal safety. They are escaping from landscapes torn apart by civil wars and the fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion or political views.

From its outset in 1946, Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) has devoted much effort towards assisting refugee populations. In the beginning, resettlement work focused on the needs of Europeans displaced by the Second World War. In the years following the war, CLWR helped tens of thousands of people to come to Canada. Among them was Harry Drung of Kitchener, who was only nine months old when his parents, Leonhard and Frieda, carried him aboard the *Beaverbrae* at a northern



The *Beaverbrae*, used during WWII as a submarine maintenance vessel, made 52 trans-Atlantic journeys to bring 33,000 refugees to Canada following WWII



Leonhard and Frieda Drung with infant son Harry in the carriage between them were among those people who came to Canada on the *Beaverbrae* following WWII. Photo: courtesy of H. Drung

German port city for the nine-day voyage to Canada and a new life.

In 1979, CLWR began a new chapter in its work with refugees when it became one of the first Sponsorship Agreement Holders in the Canadian Government's newly minted Private

Sponsorship of Refugees Program. Through this program, CLWR has helped Lutheran congregations and other sponsorship groups from across Canada welcome another 10,000 people to Canada. The faces of these more recent arrivals, however, are quite different from those who came in the 1940s and 1950s. Northern Europeans have been replaced by people from places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan as the ones in need of our assistance.

In this issue of *Partnership*, we invite you to learn more about the global refugee problem, how some congregations are putting their faith into action by welcoming strangers into their lives, and how you, too, can be involved in this rewarding and much needed work.

The view from here



Caring for refugees is fundamental and core to the mandate of CLWR. This has been the case since CLWR was established in 1946, and remains a vital part of our mission today.

CLWR encounters refugees in many ways and many parts of the world. Most often, our first engagement with refugees is abroad, in refugee camps. Many of these camps are located in Africa and Asia, and are managed by our international partner, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF is second only to the Red Cross in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, caring for hundreds of thousands of refugees each day. This support provides a vital lifeline which assists those who are required to flee from their homelands.

Our work also extends beyond the international support to assisting those who immigrate to Canada. As an agreement holder with the Government of Canada, Department for Citizenship and Immigration, CLWR offers an opportunity for Lutheran congregations and groups to sponsor refugees. The resulting partnership between CLWR and sponsors translates to literally hundreds of new Canadians being welcomed and settled into our country each year.

It is my pleasure to lift up this program and encourage your support. As one who has tracked the movement of people from dangerous and challenging circumstances, it is gratifying to see the positive impact this ministry has on the lives of the refugees, their families and Lutheran groups in Canada. Everyone is enriched by getting involved!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Granke".

Robert Granke
Executive Director

Who is a refugee?



Displaced by civil strife, people in eastern Democratic of the Congo flee with what they can carry in their arms and on their heads. Photo: UNHCR / P. Taggart

According to international conventions, a refugee is someone who, for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or for their membership in a particular social or political group, or political opinion, has fled his or her country of nationality.

If those fleeing persecution do not leave their home country, they are classed as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and, consequently, remain under the protection of their home state. Once they cross an international boundary and seek the protection of another state, their status changes, and they become what are termed asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are those who claim a fear of persecution but who have not yet had that claim evaluated. It is not until such claims have been validated by the host state or by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that official refugee status is bestowed.

Someone who is not afforded national status by any country is said to be stateless. Statelessness can be the product of discrimination against minority groups or a failure to grant national status to groups of people when new states form by succession. Stateless persons, according to United Nations estimates, number as high as 12 million.

UNHCR: leading the global response to a growing refugee crisis

When an estimated 25,000 citizens of the Ivory Coast fled to neighbouring Liberia in late 2010, the resources of the host country and small villages where temporary sanctuary was sought were severely stretched. It is situations like this that spring the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) into action. Formed in December 1950 to address the plight of Europeans displaced by the events of World War II, the Commissioner works with governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to offer protection for refugees as well as to seek long-term solutions.

It is perhaps a sad commentary that over the six decades of its operation, the UNHCR staff has grown from 34 to more than 6,660, with a budget of about US\$2 billion. At the end of 2009, 26 million of the estimated worldwide population of 43 million forcibly displaced people (10.4 million refugees; 15.6 million IDPs) were receiving protection from UNHCR.

Where are refugees located and from where did they come? Conflict in Afghanistan, which has now entered its fourth decade, has created 2.9 million refugees, while Iraq is the origin of an additional 1.8 million. Together, Afghanistan and Iraq account for almost one-half of all refugees currently under UNHCR protection. Ongoing conflicts in equatorial Africa and in the horn of Africa have pushed 2.1 million people out of their homelands, while another 800,000 have fled their homes in southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Vietnam.

That most refugees flee with few possessions and monetary resources



A Somali refugee prepares a meal for her family in Ifo camp, Dadaab, Kenya. Photo: UNHCR/B. Heger

means they most often seek initial refuge in a neighbouring country. Hence, geography as much as anything helps explain why about 80 percent of refugees are initially hosted by developing countries, those with the least capacity to do so. Pakistan, with 1.7 million, has the dubious honour of hosting the largest number of refugees of any country. Syria is the temporary home to many who have fled Iraq, while many Sudanese and Somalian refugees have moved south into Kenya.

While establishment and management of camps falls under the mandate of UNHCR, it regularly enlists the help of NGOs such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to meet this need. A case in point is the Kakuma refugee camp in the northwest corner of Kenya. Kakuma, a Swahili word for “nowhere,” is home to over 75,000 refugees. That the camp has been in existence since 1992 highlights the protracted nature of

many refugee situations. In Kakuma, the LWF manages food distribution, water supply, camp security and community services such as education. It also assists with repatriation efforts by operating a departure centre where refugees can obtain information and material supplies to support their journey home. The LWF also manages the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya. Dadaab, the world’s largest camp, hosts 300,000 people, nearly all them Somalis.

Finding what is called a durable solution for refugees is the ultimate goal of the UNHCR. While repatriation is the desired outcome, it is not always possible. When integration into the original host country is not viable either, UNHCR turns to third countries to relieve the burden. In 2009, UNHCR oversaw the resettlement of 112,400 refugees to 19 different countries. Of these, 12,500 came to Canada.

Refugee sponsorship through CLWR



At Sheder, Ethiopia, UNHCR camps provide temporary refuge for Somalis displaced by conflict in their homeland. Gathering water is an ever-present task for children. UNHCR/F. Courbet

When refugees are accepted for resettlement by a third country, support is needed in the short term to facilitate their integration into a new homeland. In some cases, such support is provided by the host government. It can also come from individuals. In the case of Canada, the latter is facilitated by the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP).

Established in 1978, the PSRP provides individual citizens and groups with a means to become more engaged in the resettlement process. In its early years, the private sponsorship program enabled tens of thousands of Indochinese refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to resettle in Canada following the Vietnam War.

CLWR has been an active participant in the PSRP right from the outset as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH). SAHs are religious, ethnic and community organizations and groups

who have been granted permission to submit refugee applications to Canada Immigration and Citizenship (CIC). In the case of CLWR, a majority of its applications are submitted on behalf of Lutheran congregations who have made commitments to support a refugee or refugee family during their first year in Canada.

CLWR maintains offices in Vancouver and Toronto. Staff in both locations provide support to congregations embarking on a sponsorship. Assistance is provided in completing application forms, pre-arrival planning, and managing the post-arrival integration of newcomers.

While there is no limit to the number of applications CLWR may submit to CIC, collectively, the 84 SAHs are assigned an annual quota of 4,200. Over the past decade, CLWR has averaged 200 applications per year, a number that reflects both what CLWR

considers its fair share of the global allotment and the capacity of its staff.

About 60% of CLWR's applications originate from congregations. The balance involve family-linked sponsorships. These arise when successfully settled refugees approach CLWR or congregations for assistance in reuniting them with family members left behind.

While CLWR makes applications to CIC, it is CIC that makes a final decision as to whether a specified refugee is eligible to come to Canada. The approval process can be lengthy. As of October 2010, more than 42,000 applications for refugee resettlement were awaiting review in Canadian immigration offices around the world. Hence, opting to sponsor a refugee or refugee family that has already obtained clearance can shorten the time between when an application is submitted and when an arrival is celebrated.

Lutheran congregations put faith into action



Members of First Lutheran, Calgary, gather on the front steps of their church to welcome 18 Sudanese refugees into their community. Photo: courtesy of Ben Ledene

Members of First Lutheran, Calgary, had cause to rejoice last September when they were finally able to welcome 18 members of a Sudanese family into their community. This story actually began in 1998, when the Canadian government sponsored James Hoth and Elizabeth Chol to come to Calgary from the Fugnido Refugee Camp in Ethiopia. In 2004, the couple and their children began attending First Lutheran.

As members at the church got to know the family, they learned of the 11 relatives James and Elizabeth had left behind in Ethiopia. Over the next two years, CLWR was contacted to explore the possibility of reuniting the family, a formal refugee committee was established, and a Canada Immigration resettlement application was prepared and submitted.

By August 2006, with \$30,000 of fundraising already completed, not

much was left to do but wait. And it was quite the wait—just over four years. A normally slow process was complicated by marriages and new births that added seven more people to the family. Two years into the process, James travelled to Ethiopia to assist with the preparation of a new set of applications.

When James and Elizabeth's family finally touched down at the Calgary airport last September, almost five years had elapsed since the original application had been submitted. Interest in the congregation, though, had not waned. They were ready with two rental homes waiting for their new occupants, along with a supply of clothing, food and other household needs. By mid January, all three of James' brothers and Elizabeth's brother and brother-in-law had found employment and all family members were receiving ESL training.

BUILDING A NEST IN WINNIPEG

While the members of NEST have never sponsored a group the size of the Hoth family, they are no strangers to the struggles and rewards of helping refugees establish new lives in Canada. NEST is an acronym for North End Sponsorship Team, a group of seven Lutheran and two United Church congregations located in Winnipeg. The acronym also fittingly reflects the words of Matthew. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

NEST was formed in 1985, when several congregations pooled their efforts to respond to an appeal by CLWR. An Eritrean widow and her daughter were the first to be sponsored. Since then, another 145 people from 17 different countries have been resettled. Applications for another 53 refugees are currently in the Canadian immigration pipeline.

Today, the team has 25-30 active members who help with integrating new arrivals into Canadian society, planning fundraising and educational awareness events, and staging social gatherings that help NEST stay in touch with past arrivals. Total funds raised and received during its 25 years of operation exceed \$250,000.

The Winnipeg NEST has a sister NEST in Saskatoon. Several years ago, word of NEST's Winnipeg activities spread westward to family and friends of Winnipeg volunteers who formed their own sponsorship team in that city.

IT'S ABOUT MISSION

Across Southern Ontario, in places such as Brantford, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto and Windsor, refugee sponsorship has struck a

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chord with many Lutheran congregations. Some have a long history of involvement. At St. John, Toronto, members have been reaching out to their surrounding community since the early 1990s, offering assistance that has reunited over 400 people with family who had previously immigrated to Canada. Others have undertaken sponsorships to mark special events in the life of their congregation. Advent, Toronto, recently welcomed a refugee family from Iraq, a project that grew out of its 40th anniversary celebrations. Meanwhile, several Lutheran Church–Canada congregations in the Niagara region are exploring ways they can work cooperatively to bring a refugee family to Canada.

What has motivated these and other congregations across the country to become so involved? Undoubtedly, mission-mindedness is at play. Ben Ledene, who helped coordinate the refugee sponsorship team at First, Calgary, says its sponsorship gave members “a sense of being able to provide mission and really see it in action. We often talk about helping people in faraway lands, but never see the result. Here we have the results amongst us.” Similar thoughts are expressed by



Afghanis Fatima Noori and her son Kareem are two of hundreds of refugees who have resettled in the Greater Toronto Area with the help of the Lutheran community. They are settling in well in their new home in Scarborough, where Kareem has found work at a meat market. Photo: J. Drews

Pastor Brian Wilker Frey, St. Ansgar, Toronto, whose congregation has sponsored several refugee families over the past fifteen years. “I think people are always looking for ways to enact their faith. Refugee sponsorship is the perfect vehicle for this. It has definitely given the congregation a sense of being in mission beyond the walls of the church.”

Jim Mair, a long-serving Winnipeg NEST member, knows full well the

amount of time and effort required to successfully complete a sponsorship. Overcoming language barriers, finding affordable housing, helping with job searches and orienting newcomers to life in Canada are all formidable challenges. But for him and other members of the team, knowing that you have helped someone escape from a terrible situation and seeing them experience freedom and safety makes it all worthwhile.

REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP—HOW TO GET STARTED

It could be as simple as striking up a conversation at Sunday morning coffee hour and asking what it would take for your congregation to sponsor a refugee. You might also try gathering a few like-minded people for a brainstorming session and then approaching your congregational council with your ideas. Who knows where it might lead.

And, of course, CLWR is there to provide support. Staff from our Toronto and Vancouver refugee offices are available for presentations, to provide training for volunteers, and possibly help connect you with other congregations in your area seeking to form a local refugee sponsorship network. They are also ready to answer any questions you might have about any aspect of refugee sponsorship. Contact telephone and email addresses for both offices can be found on the back cover of this newsletter.

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Did you know you can make a real impact on the lives of those we serve together by making a Global Legacy gift through your estate or other planned giving vehicles? This is an opportunity to demonstrate to others the values that you hold dear.

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To learn more about refugee sponsorship in Canada, please visit, www.cic.gc.ca

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