



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Christian Hospitality and Welcoming the Stranger

More than 60 years ago, in the aftermath of World War II, churches in the United States came together to respond to the needs of refugees left homeless by the war in Europe and Asia and formed an ecumenical organization they called Church World Service (CWS). Even though members of congregations throughout the United States faced many hardships of their own, they worked through CWS to help refugees find new homes and begin new lives in the United States. This faith-based commitment to welcome the stranger has endured, and over the decades thousands of churches have made the challenging decision to assist and befriend refugees starting over in the United States. The success of refugees in the United States depends greatly on the welcome they receive when they arrive.

Providing Hospitality is a Church Tradition

The refugee ministry is one of hope, where individuals reach out to others in a troubled world for a better future, responding to God's call to stand with uprooted people. The churches' history of responding to the needs of refugees is marked by ingenuity and a willingness to go the extra mile - to make the impossible possible. So much has been accomplished - more than 450,000 refugees resettled by churches ecumenically in the U.S., many families reunited and friends made - and those who have participated have said over and over that the gifts they received were far greater than those they gave.

Although churches have worked hard ecumenically for decades to address difficult refugee and immigration concerns at home and abroad through CWS/IRP, the needs are still great. While some refugee groups have been able to return home in safety and in dignity or have been able to find new homes in neighboring countries, new refugee groups continue to emerge, who need the attention of the international community. As anti-immigrant sentiment rises in this country and others, the churches' work with refugees is even more challenging and critical.

Helping refugees face the difficult challenges of adjustment to life in the U.S. and building a hospitable environment for their resettlement make 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 such as the U.S. (less than one percent of the world refugee population annually), but resettlement is important for many reasons. Not only are resettled refugees able to find safe haven and an opportunity to start over in a new country, but this international expression of caring encourages other countries to keep their doors open to people who cannot return home.

The New Testament urges validation of each person by reinforcing biblical hospitality. **Hebrews 13:2** urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." The mandate was and remains clear. As we read the New Testament, we see people moving freely, without borders, and we see new life, as their lives are changed through contact with Christ and / or his disciples. Paul reinforces this teaching in **Romans 12:13**, with, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program: www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration