

The mission committee has been trying to find a way to address the refugee crisis since the fall. I think it's fair to say that we each individually felt called to work with refugees—we were watching the news and seeing horrific images on social media but didn't know how to respond. We shared these concerns at a mission committee meeting in the fall and then heard about a workshop on refugees. Kathy McDonald, Judy Dawson, and I attended the workshop at RefugeeOne and the mission committee decided that we would work towards the goal of co-sponsoring a refugee with RefugeeOne.

RefugeeOne has helped more than 15,000 refugees in Chicago since 1982. If you worked with former St. Luke refugee families, you will know this group as IRIM—it changed the name to RefugeeOne in 2010.

We've realized that language matters a lot when you are explaining the refugee situation. The terms refugee and immigrant are not interchangeable. Refugees are people who have fled their countries to escape war or persecution. They receive status from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and are selected for resettlement by the U.S. Department of State. According to RefugeeOne, refugees wait an average of 17 years to be resettled; expedited cases can take two to three years. While most immigrants may safely return to their home countries, the fear of persecution prevents refugees from any attempt to return. (from RefugeeOne co-sponsorship package). The Syrian refugees have received the most media attention recently, but at this time, RefugeeOne serves refugees primarily from Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Ethiopia and Sudan.

RefugeeOne finds affordable housing for refugees in neighborhoods with direct public transit to the RefugeeOne office. They are located on North Broadway in Chicago; if we co-sponsor a family, they will likely be living in Chicago's Rogers Park, West Ridge, Albany Park, or another neighborhood close to the office. RefugeeOne assists the family with integration into American culture, helps build their English language skills, and provides employment assistance. Their goal is to help refugees become self-reliant in as few as 6-12 months.

St. Luke has sponsored refugees in the past and as I understand it, much of our effort was directed towards gathering furnishings for an apartment. RefugeeOne has recently shifted towards a model of co-sponsorship; I believe it is more cost effective and efficient for them to set up the apartment and they are looking now for groups that are able to directly help the refugees during their first few months in Chicago. RefugeeOne has created a list of different activities for co-sponsors and we must choose three but can volunteer for more. The list is challenging for a small congregation like St. Luke—it includes things like meeting weekly with the family for six months or visiting periodically.

The mission committee looked at the list and was so excited with the thought of really connecting with and supporting a refugee family, but we thought this would be a stretch for St. Luke. God was working in the background for us, though; Lesley had been having conversations with other faith groups in the area and all of a sudden, we had a big group of people who were interested in working with refugees. Last month, the mission committee hosted a meeting that included members from First Congregational in Downers Grove, Mecca Center, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, and the pastor from United Methodist. Each group is going back to examine RefugeeOne's co-sponsor activity list and discern where they might be able to provide help. While no one group may be able to visit

a family on a weekly basis, we hope we can find three or four families who can share this commitment. The excitement and energy in this meeting was thrilling and the mission committee is so excited that we are leading this interfaith group with the hope of co-sponsoring a family.

As I shared at the Congregational Meeting last week, St. Luke is able to provide the financial means to make this project work. Thanks to your generous giving, we already have the \$8000 required to co-sponsor a family. I anticipate that we will be approaching you again in the coming months, but instead of asking for financial support, we will be asking for your time. We ask right now that you prayerfully consider what you might be able to provide: Would you be willing to be part of the group that welcomes a family at the airport? Would you be able to take a family to a museum and help them practice their English? Could you help prepare a culturally appropriate meal so that the family can have some connection to home as they arrive in a new country?

Throughout this process, I have repeatedly used the phrase "under commit and over deliver." St. Luke's mission committee feels the call to respond in a big way to the refugee crisis, but we wanted to make sure we weren't overwhelming or over committing our congregation. Now that we have the support of these other groups, we really feel we will be able to commit to co-sponsoring a family. We will be meeting again with the other groups and then we will come back to you with more specifics. If you have questions, members of the mission committee (Kathy McDonald, Judy Dawson, Amy Smith or Ron Kelder) will be available after today's service. We'd love to talk to you more and share some of the exciting possibilities for the future.