



October 11 2022

## ***WELCOME: stories from Week of Compassion's Refugee and Immigrant Response***

*In this four-part series, over the course of a year, we are in conversation with some California Disciples and their ecumenical collaborators as they welcome an Afghan family into their community, offering radical hospitality and welcome to new neighbors in their midst. We also include a few brief check-ins with other Disciples doing similar work in their own communities.*



## **WELCOME**

stories of  
**REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT RESPONSE**



~ sustainable ~ accessible ~ visible ~

Catch up with part one, 'How It All Started', [here](#).

*In late 2021, Church of the Foothills, a Disciples/UCC yoked church in Santa Ana CA, was moved to respond to the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan, and turned to Week of Compassion, who was able to connect them with First Christian Church, Orange, and provide an [Afghan Welcome support grant](#). Now four churches strong - Church of the Foothills, First Christian Orange, Irvine United Church of Christ, and Tapestry Unitarian Universalist Fellowship - with congregational pastors and leadership on board, this partnership started their work.*

## **FROM IDEA TO ACTION**

Once the four congregations committed to support an Afghan evacuee family, they had to organize carefully to be most effective in their shared ministry. They called this shared effort New Beginnings, because they sensed this would be more than a single opportunity, but an ongoing ministry to offer new beginnings to many refugee families.

New Beginnings contacted [International Institute of Los Angeles](#) (IILA), an organization that offers a variety of services to immigrant and refugee families in Southern California, with a particular calling to help with reception and placement of refugees. In the unique experience of the Afghan evacuation, IILA stepped up to help bring evacuees to Southern California.

Although they didn't "have it all together" yet - plenty of questions remained about logistics, basic needs, and resources - New Beginnings knew they didn't have time to waste. **The need was immediate, and the response had to be immediate too.** Without knowing how New Beginnings was going to be structured, how the volunteers would be coordinated, and how the funding would be shared (or even if there would even be enough funds for the full commitment of this ministry), New Beginnings took a giant step in faith.

Eventually, they established a shared pool of resources with one congregation taking on the role of primary accountant; rather than each church tracking its individual responses and expenses, a shared account kept New Beginnings' responses more nimble, efficient and effective. They are grateful for support from sibling congregations in other cities: after an introduction and connection made by Week of Compassion, Church of the Foothills received a participation grant from Union Avenue Christian Church in Litchfield, Illinois, a church with outreach funding that they wanted to direct specifically for responses to the immediate needs of refugees.

As New Beginnings, the four partnering churches worked together with the team at IILA to make sure that these new neighbors would be set up for success in the United States. As Church of the Foothills interim pastor Rev. Bill Jacobs shares,

*"This family fled Afghanistan and came to our area because they had family in the area who were settled here [but this extended family did not have the capacity to serve as their resettlement sponsors].*

*We stood in the gap for this family over the summer, helping them avoid eviction by navigating an extension to their lease... We set them up for medical and social services for two older adults beyond working age. Some of our help came in the form of rent assistance and money for clothes and basic supplies, while the great majority of our time and effort came in helping the oldest daughter find employment. She is now enrolled in classes that may lead to certification for a job as a child care teacher or a teaching assistant within the local school district.*

*Some of our group have professional ties to Orange Coast College, while others specialize in managing legal contracts and filling out government assistance paperwork. Some are simply helping out with laundry, shopping and medical appointments. Together we make a great team and have formed fast friendships, and we think our experience is leading us to take the next step and sponsor another family this fall."*

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## MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT

*There are countless ways to WELCOME. Not every church can do every part of the vast work of refugee welcome and resettlement - and not every church goes about it the same way. Here are a few glimpses of how others have moved their refugee response from idea to action:*

\* **Auditorio Vida en Familia**, a La Obra congregation in Tampa had a somewhat different approach to the ministry. When the Church World Service offices in Tampa reached out to Week of Compassion about an arriving Guatemalan family in need of a community connection, Rev. Alan Dicken (Associate Director of Refugee and Immigrant Response) called on Rev. Gustavo Espinosa to see if their church could help. *Within the week*, Iglesia de la Vida was welcoming a new family of Guatemalan refugees into their community! (Read the full story [here](#).)

\* **Chicago Christian Church**, a Korean speaking church that is a part of NAPAD, saw a need to help welcome Ukrainian refugees into their community. Church member Cindy Kim-Hengst, also a member of the Week of Compassion Board of Stewards, helped her congregation connect with local resettlement offices and assisted in leading her congregation's response, with the help of another Disciples pastor in the area, Rev. Allison Lundblad of Christian Church of Arlington Heights. Although they are a smaller congregation, Chicago Christian Church felt the Spirit move and answered a call to help. Pulling together resources through their membership and from social network circles, the church ended up with *more than enough* to set up a welcoming home, with an inviting apartment and warm welcome ready for a Ukrainian refugee family when they arrived!

\* Several congregations of the Disciples of Christ in Nebraska were pulled together through local leadership and support from the Regional Minister, Rev. Chris Morton. Two teams, one in Lincoln and one in Omaha, have formed to help resettle Afghan families. Some churches had been involved in refugee work before, but for others, this was entirely new. While experienced members were able to connect with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services in Nebraska, new volunteers were able to learn the ropes of how to connect with agencies, what hosting a family

looks like, and how multiple congregations can form effective teams to engage in shared ministry. Together they have helped serve dozens of Afghan evacuees.

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*We are eager to connect with Disciples across the diversity of our church, and the breadth of our experience - whether you have long experience in refugee response or just need help getting started. There are so many great stories to tell about this vital response to Christ's call to welcome the stranger. We look forward to sharing yours!*



For more ways you and your church can engage in refugee resettlement, contact

**[Rev. Alan Dicken](#)**  
Associate Director for  
Refugee & Immigrant Response

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**Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.**

Week of Compassion works with partners to alleviate suffering around the world, toward the vision of a world where God's people transform suffering into hope.

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