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WELCOME: stories from Week of Compassion's Refugee and Immigrant Response
In this four-part series, over the course of a year, we have been in conversation with California Disciples and their ecumenical collaborators as they welcome an Afghan family into their community, offering radical hospitality and welcome to new neighbors. We also share brief stories from other Disciples doing similar work in their own communities.



WELCOME 
stories of
REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT RESPONSE
~ sustainable ~ accessible ~ visible ~

Since last year, we have shared stories of Disciples caring for Afghan refugees.

Start at the beginning: [How It All Started](#).

Learn how things moved [From Idea to Action](#).

See communities find [More Than They Imagined](#).

In this final segment, leaders reflect on the experience and impact on the congregations that have been involved in this powerful ministry.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

When the church started this response, they had no idea where this journey would take them. That is what it is like when you answer the call to follow Christ in this world. You take a step without knowing where the path will lead you, but you step anyway because you have faith in the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Church of the Foothills (Santa Ana CA) believed they were going to be helping one family, for a couple of months, as they resettled from Afghanistan.

Now, a year later, they have developed an entirely new non-profit, in partnership with three other congregations, called New Beginnings. The church has grown into broader community relationships and connectivity, thriving as they discover their unique strengths, and how to complement the gifts found in other churches. **Each congregation is doing work they never thought possible, ministry they could not have realized alone.** Together, these churches are able to accomplish so much more than they ever would have imagined.

Pastor Bill Jacobs has just concluded his interim Senior Minister role at Church of the Foothills, and led the church as they moved through this first year of refugee response:

"New Beginnings was formed in the spring of 2022 in recognition of a shared desire on the part of justice action teams in four congregations to help Afghan families after Kabul was overrun by Taliban in August of 2021. Our goal was to guide these refugees toward a sustainable lifestyle and gainful employment. We connect them with charitable agencies, government services,

schools, mosques and doctors, getting to know them as we do so. We hear incredible, often harrowing stories of their experiences of escaping Kabul and making their way to the U.S.

The first families were referred to us through International Institute of Los Angeles. We began by asking for donations of household items, bus passes, and rolls of quarters (for laundry) for this family of two adult sisters and their elderly parents who had moved into an apartment in Costa Mesa. We helped them get to appointments and helped them shop for clothing.

Most families arrive with at least one English-speaking family member, but still struggle to find work, move independently, and pay their rent each month. In one case a church family wanted to donate a car to an Afghan family and we helped the wage-earner to get his license. We are helping another family make periodic payments to a repair shop in the coming year. We are making sure the kids are in school. We are not seeking to direct their lives, but want to be able to offer compassionate presence while families move toward sustainable living patterns.

Many regular volunteers from our four partner congregations are now helping more than eight Afghan families rebuild their lives, which is reshaping ours in the process. We have logged more than 8000 volunteer hours helping families find lodging, employment, medical care and connection in Orange County."

What started as an initial desire to respond to a global crisis by helping even one Afghan family has developed into a ministry that has the momentum to carry into shared partnership for many years to come.

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 discovered more than they imagined:

* In the [Georgia Region](#), Kathy McDowell celebrates the success of a resettled family, assisted by a group of metro Atlanta churches working together since 2021. Asif, equipped with both undergraduate and a graduate degree, worked with the team on his resume, job search, and preparation, landing a job with Accenture. Asif, his wife, and their eight children were able to move to the Washington DC area in June. Kathy says, "We loved the program, the process, and what we learned about our capacity and our faith in offering radical hospitality and seeing a new friend thrive in this country."

* Rev. Dr. Tom Lyda of [First Christian Church, Norman OK](#), honors the impact of Christians serving together for the good of others: "We could never have done it on our own and never would have made such a big impact if we had tried. Together with several ecumenical partners around Norman, including Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, UCC, Presbyterians, and Catholics, we have a new community partner in the Norman Coalition for Refugee Support. We are proud to welcome people to Norman and we are a better community because of our new neighbors"

* [Ashland Christian Church](#) is far from a megachurch. They don't have infinite resources or money, but they do have a heart and passion for helping the Afghan neighbors who have recently moved to their part of Virginia. What started as an offering of an ESL program has expanded into multiple services, job connections, transportation, housing support, and celebrations with people that would otherwise have remained strangers to the church. **The whole church is better for continuing to draw wider circles of God's love.**

Is your church involved in refugee response? Join with other Disciples in **monthly online gatherings** to share stories, consider resources, and receive support.

Would you like to know more about **getting started** in one of the many entry points for congregations eager to connect with families resettling?

Whether you have long experience in refugee response, are ready to connect with others, or just need help getting started, [contact Week of Compassion](#).



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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