

Action Update- November 18

Together For a Common Purpose

Disciples Congregations Work to Welcome Afghans



Many congregations have been working over the past weeks to respond to the growing need and help welcome Afghans to their local communities. Across the country, Disciples have been setting up apartments, collecting food and stocking kitchens, and helping enroll children in school—just a few of the details that need to be taken into account when a family starts life in a new country and culture.

First Christian Church of Bowling Green, Kentucky, has a long history of supporting refugees locally. In the early 1990s, the church worked to help resettle Bosnian refugees in the community. Through that ministry, they built strong relationships with several families who remain friends of the congregation to this day.

First Christian Church Bowling Green has also developed strong ties with community partners which they have maintained over the years. So when the need arose to help prepare the way for those arriving from Afghanistan, FCC was among the first contacts of the International Center of Kentucky, a local refugee resettlement agency.

Rev. Megan Huston, FCC's Senior Minister, responded to the invitation to join a call that the Center was hosting to connect local resources and organize a response quickly. Having walked alongside newly arrived refugees in the past, the congregation knew that this moment was an opportunity—an invitation to not just write a check, but to get to know their new neighbors in a meaningful way.

Ultimately, dozens of participants showed up for that initial virtual conversation. Community partners included school leaders, social workers, retirees, the sheriff's department, medical workers, lawyers...and of course, churches.

Each person on the call had specific questions about how their work could support the needs of those arriving in their community. "It was the most inspiring call because all of these important people just sat and listened for an hour," says Rev. Huston. "It was a very inspiring thing coming out of the context of a divided community...we were there together for the common purpose of supporting our new neighbors."

Initially, FCC set aside \$10k to help meet needs of new arrivals. They also received additional funds through a congregational support grant from Week of Compassion. The plan was to use these funds to help with housing, as well as mentoring and support that could help new neighbors integrate into the local culture. However, the church learned that the local resettlement office had other resources available to help with immediate housing and other needs; now, the church plans to make those funds available once initial assistance runs out from other sources and as new needs emerge.

This type of flexibility is critical when it comes to working alongside resettled families. First Christian's existing relationships with their local resettlement office means that they are good community partners who aren't trying to 'reinvent the wheel,' but can supplement existing efforts and help fill in gaps where bigger agencies can't meet every need.

In the meantime, the congregation has transformed a pre-existing food pantry ministry that they hosted on site to better meet the needs of resettled families. It is now more of a 'grocery store' model, operating in a way that offers more choice and dignity to those receiving assistance. Part of their plan was to build up an inventory of regionally specific foods that would appeal to Afghan families, but now, they are learning that new arrivals would rather have more local products. The church is using that guidance as well, pivoting as needs emerge and adjusting accordingly.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, South Suburban Christian Church of Littleton, Colorado is also building on existing community partnerships in order to meet needs. Their connections with neighboring congregations; the local office of Lutheran Family Services; a local high school that serves many refugee families; faith-based and secular organizations; and even a friend from out of town, who had some job opportunities in the area, all converged to create a great opportunity for the church to respond.

The church hosted a gathering for anyone who was interested in helping create welcome. It was a "we'll see who comes" mentality—and 45 people showed up.

From that initial gathering, 30 people—church members and neighbors like—have committed to volunteering at various levels. Altogether, the group has the capacity to help resettle 4 families. South Suburban will work with Lutheran Family Services to host volunteer trainings, which prepare volunteers to help new arrivals with logistics like setting up a bank account, getting a driver's license, and shopping for groceries. Volunteers are also working to secure housing, knowing that they will only have about 24 hours notice before the first families arrive.

More importantly, they are preparing to meet the greatest need that their new neighbors will have: being friends.

South Suburban's Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Ike Nicholson, says, "It's been a real God thing—certainly not because of anyone's managerial success, but because God has laid a burden on certain people's hearts... When you're putting all of those efforts together, you're providing a lot.


Initially it was easy to get overwhelmed by '900 people,' so we tried not to focus on that so much. What can we do to help 4 families? My God... certainly that can happen!"


In this critical moment, Disciples across the U.S. are making a difference in the lives of those who come to seek a new beginning in our communities. Week of Compassion is committed to supporting congregations in this important ministry of hospitality—immediately, and for the longer journey ahead.


Week of Compassion provides congregational support grants to encourage and strengthen Disciples churches in welcoming Afghans to communities across the U.S., in partnership with their local resettlement agencies. This grant can be used for congregational ministries that help with food assistance, rent, or any other essentials.


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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.

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