



Advocacy Efforts

A significant amount of work that we do in the Office for Refugees is focused on advocacy. This advocacy takes many forms.

- We advocate for refugees as a whole, urging government to increase the number of refugees that can be sponsored under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program;
- We advocate for refugees that we have selected during our overseas missions when their case is unfairly rejected by Immigration Canada; and
- We advocate for the strengthening of the PSR program. It is this latter advocacy work that I wish to highlight in this month's issue.

Every 5 years, Immigration Canada prepares a new Agreement for Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) to sign. The Agreement outlines the responsibilities that sponsors take on in sponsoring refugees from abroad. The 2018 Agreement, signaled a dramatic shift in the PSR program, significantly increasing the costs of refugee sponsorship for sponsors. The changes became a significant cause of concern for us and for many other SAHs. As the largest SAH in

Canada, we felt a particular responsibility to bring our concerns and those of other SAHs to the attention of our political leaders. We did just that.

In early 2018 and again in early 2019, we met with the Conservative Immigration Critic, the Honourable Michelle Rempel. In late 2018, we met separately with another member of the Conservative Party, Garnett Genuis, MP for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. Most recently, we, along with members of the Catholic Refugees Sponsorship Council (an umbrella organization for Catholic SAHs) met with the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and with his Chief of Staff, Zubair Patel. In each of these meetings, we outlined in detail the key areas of concern and offered proposals of how best to address these concerns. A thorough brief was prepared by our office and shared with Minister Hussen in hopes of getting some accommodation.

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From left to right: Rabea Allos, the Honourable Ahmed D. Hussen, Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, and Diane Dicks.



From left to right: Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, Luciano Moro, Michelle Rempel and Rabea Allos

Thank you to our



For all your hard work at ORAT

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It appears that our efforts have borne some fruit. At the recent annual SAH Conference, we met with representatives of Immigration Canada, and as a result of the appeals made by various SAHs, including our own, IRCC announced that certain accommodations would be made to address some of the concerns that had been expressed.

While good progress has been made, much more work still needs to be done to ensure that the PSR program remains strong and continues to be the envy of the world as we work to address the suffering of refugees.

Please continue to pray for us, that our efforts would be guided by the Lord, who Himself, was a stranger in a foreign land.

Celebrating 10 Newcomer Families...and Counting

By Antoniette Pace

Lay Pastoral Assitant, St. Benedict Parish

It began as an idea by a volunteer. Soon after, the same idea was shared by another volunteer in a separate and unrelated conversation. The idea: a newcomer reunion. And why not since our Salesian parish of St. Benedict is currently sponsoring its 10th newcomer family. With minimal planning and great enthusiasm, an evening newcomer potluck dinner was set in motion for Saturday April 6, 2019. It was certainly an occasion to celebrate!

Invited were the newcomer families originally from Iraq, Syria, Ivory Coast and Eritrea. Welcoming our first family, Ahlam Jonah and her three daughters in April 2013, our two most recent newcomer families, Jan and Marie and Mikhaeil and Terez arrived in May 2018. While some families live close to St. Benedict in Etobicoke, and remain active in the life of the parish, others have resettled in Brampton, Markham and Woodbridge.

The gathering was, in true Salesian style, a spirit-filled and playful family event that included an abundance of delicious homemade cultural foods, fun and games for the kids, family photos and, to complete the evening, a piñata with plenty of treats to go around. Besides tasty culinary dishes, our newcomers shared an even more valuable gift: a wholesome sense of family across the generations; grandparents, parents and children. Particularly

special that evening was the joyful welcome of baby Andrea, daughter of Kameel and Arij, born in March 2019. And as big brother Fikrab and little sister Batel played with their many new friends,

their father, Berhane, beamed as he shared news of the birth of his son, Suraphel, born only 2 days earlier. With a simple glance around the room or through the casual conversations that evening, there was so much more being celebrated: lives saved, families able to sleep at night, relatives reunited, growing language skills, advancements in education and employment, giving back to the community and others in need.

In good number, too, at our gathering was the army of volunteers that helped with the various sponsorships and co-sponsorships. Many from St. Benedict parish, some came from other parishes including Barb and Grant Evers from St. Roch's and Franca Gallucci from All Saints.



Current and past Pastors of St. Benedict; Members of the parish's Refugee Committee, Representatives from ORAT, sponsored refugee families

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Celebrating 10 Newcomer Families...and Counting

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Also present were volunteers, Rita Perta and Vicky Ton representing others from St. Justin Martyr parish, Markham, who in 2015, took it upon themselves to resettle Fiacre and Diana in Markham. Their enthusiastic initiative and leadership in that sponsorship with the St. Benedict resettlement committee provides a beautiful model of how one parish could work collaboratively with another sponsoring parish in the important year-long process of resettlement. Truly the work of resettlement is not possible without the heart and hands of many generous volunteers. For them, we are very grateful!

Completing our gathering was Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, Director of ORAT and Louise Leung, Outreach Assistant at ORAT. Grateful to have them with us, their presence reminded us of the competent and guiding presence they and their colleagues continue to be to our parish resettlement committee. They remind us of where it all began: from the unseen groundwork of the mission trips to refugee camps in countries of refuge, to the in-person interviews with refugee families on the ground, meetings with immigration and government officials, paperwork, sponsorship files, orientation sessions and more than we'll ever know, is it any wonder why our newcomer reunion of 10 families was a uniquely special occasion to celebrate!



Newcomer Children enjoying their meal

Motivated by the life-saving and life-giving mission that we partake in as collaborators in the work of resettlement, and affirmed by the dignity restored to our newcomer friends, we pray for, and look forward to, the arrival of our next newcomer who will be reunited with one of our families. Celebrating 10 and counting!

Adzamega Family Settlement in Canada

By Allan Perron

Refugee Committee Coordinator, Holy Family Parish

On November 28, 2018, our Holy Family Parish sponsorship team welcomed three of the Adzamega family members; followed by the additional 5 family members in February 2019. Their past hardships were quickly forgotten when their feet landed on Canadian soil at Toronto Pearson Airport. Their 25 years of living in a Ghana camp were finally over and their newly found freedom and peaceful surroundings in Canada warmly embraced them.

Having experienced the hardships of flight from their homeland in Togo, political and governmental unrest and military suppression and aggression, they journeyed by foot and rustic transportation to refuge in a Ghana refugee camp in 1993. Endangered by war and threats of death by opposing military troops, they found refuge finally in the camp. Where, over their 25 years there, they were met with hunger, prejudices and survival.



From left to right in the photo: Allan Perron (Holy Family Refugee Committee Coordinator), David Adzamega, Robert Adzamega, Francis Adzamega.

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Adzamega Family Settlement in Canada

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Having appealed through the sponsorship program through the Archdiocese of Toronto and with a wait of 5 years, they finally arrived in Canada with the distinct hope of a new life. Settling into a “ready-made” home in a local area of Durham, our parish was able to quickly orient them to a new future with jobs for 5 of the 8-family members, while also establishing schools, ESL classes, and travelling on bus routes. Whenever our team would ask how they liked Canada (especially in the midst of a cold winter) all we would hear is “We love it!” Bundled in warm clothing and boots, they ventured into our winter seeing a new weather substance called “snow”. We let them know that winter would not be a permanent state and that other warmer seasons would follow.

Our group counselled them on money matters followed. Hunger would never be their enemy again. Their own home would be warm and inviting and full of smiles. Bikes were provided to them and G1 licences quickly followed. Hearts being opened, we all soon became wonderful friends with each other and enjoyed God’s goodness through our shared time together.

Fr. Laszlo Nagy - Pastor, Refugee committee – Suzan Holmes, Jack Ballard, Mary Hawkley, Madonna Augustus, Lise Beauchesne, Paddy Cauley, Janet and Mike Connors, Ryan and Linda Harlock, Carol Mahoney, Marci MacDonald, Patti Orecchio, John Simmons, Joe Visconti

ORAT is offering information sessions through Webinars

In response to the large number of request of Cosponsors and CG members to make our information available online, ORAT is pleased to announce that registration is now open to attend our Information Sessions through online Webinars.

This will enable individuals to remotely attend sessions and download handouts. It has always been ORAT’s desire to make fullest use of technology in order to make the information that we share as widely available as possible. Registration for the webinars will be available through Eventbrite at <http://orat.eventbrite.com>

Upcoming Sessions

As part of its mission, ORAT provides information sessions to educate the general public, cosponsors, Constituent Groups, and newcomers about refugee resettlement. A number of different information sessions have been developed that are designed to inform attendees about a specific aspect of refugee resettlement. Information is delivered in a simplified, yet robust manner, and is tailored to meet the needs of peoples from various backgrounds.

It is a requirement for all cosponsors and CG members to attend ORAT’s information sessions if they wish to submit an application through the office.

Registration can be completed on Eventbrite through the following link: <http://orat.eventbrite.com>



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