



## Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

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### **Refugee Resettlement Ministry—for Syrians and All Refugees**

As news of the horrors of the Syrian Civil War continues to touch our hearts deeply, many of our congregations are asking: “How can we engage in ministry with refugees?” Diocesan global mission personnel have updated information on how to become more involved with refugees—from Syria and from many other countries as well.

Until recently, Syrian refugees in Massachusetts have tended to resettle in the central and western part of the state, due to the high cost of living in the east. This is rapidly changing; the number of families all over Massachusetts has doubled over the past year. There are now a few Syrian families in many of our diocesan communities—Beverly, Billerica, Boston, South Boston, Lynn and Tewksbury. As of October 2016, there were 31 families in Lowell.

**“What can we do?”**: The specific activities needed can be found by partnering with a local resettlement agency that is involved with refugee resettlement. They are the experts in knowing what specific families need both materially and emotionally. Keep the focus on the relational aspects of this ministry. It is much more of a mutual process when you are able to meet families face-to-face, hear their stories and share your own stories with them. As important as housing and furnishings are, the spiritual and emotional aspects of being accompanied through their journey are critical, as long as you are following guidelines set out by the resettlement agency.

Once your congregation has partnered with an agency, there are many different types of assistance you might be asked to assist with that involve varying levels of time, energy, skill and commitment. Some of these might include:

1. Financial donations—contributing directly to the refugee resettlement agency.
2. Talk with local, state and national government leaders and agencies to lobby for more resources for refugee families.
3. Collection drives—food, clothing, home furnishings, etc. that families will need.
4. Introduce a family to a local faith community, whether it be your own or another.
5. Introduction/orientation to their new neighborhood.
6. Be a friend. Commit to meet for tea once a week to talk about the week, answer questions, celebrate successes and strategize challenges.
7. Teach/tutor families new to this country on one of a variety of topics: navigating public transportation, food shopping, discount shopping, Internet skills, learning about American culture, such as traditions and holidays, language skills (tutoring as well as

having conversations to practice English). Children may need some extra tutoring in school during their resettlement period.

8. Driving—help family members get to doctors, dentists, agency appointments or to a local food pantry, job interview, school meetings, etc.

9. Take a family into your home for a few months until they are able to find affordable housing.

Contact the diocesan global mission office for resources. We have a list of approved resettlement agencies in Massachusetts, with contact information. We have links to the latest news from Episcopal Migration Ministries and other organizations that are involved in resettlement. We have a list of the congregations that we know of which have experience with refugee ministry and may be able to share their wisdom. We have time to visit your congregation or deanery to help inform, guide and support your ministries.

If your congregation is already engaged in refugee ministry, and has not done so already, please do let us know about it. Also let us know if you are willing to partner with other congregations who are looking to start a new ministry in this area.

If your congregation is raising funds to support a refugee ministry, apply for a Mission Tithe Matching Grant that is available for congregations who wish to engage in relational refugee ministry. Please contact Laura Walta for details.

We are here to provide resources and guidance, and also to keep a database so that we can all remain connected to each other as we journey through this critical sacred ministry with our refugee brothers and sisters.

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