



“Homeless, homesick and hopeless”

were the words chosen by a resident of El Hol Refugee Camp, Syria in describing himself and his family. And now, even this camp is closing.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Canadian Embassy in Syria are desperately seeking sponsors for refugee families who have already been approved to come to Canada. These families trace their roots to Palestine before the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. Displaced to Iraq, they were forced to flee again after the Iran-Iraq conflict. Borders were closed to them and they have since been stranded in the Syrian desert. With the volatile political climate, they have absolutely no prospect of staying in Syria, or of returning to either Iraq or Palestine.

In response to the invitation from Immigration Canada, churches and organizations across Canada have joined together to sponsor families. The Nanaimo Refugee Sponsorship Group has already welcomed one family and is awaiting the arrival of their second. **Ladysmith First United Church recently agreed to become the official signatory to a local, multi-church community effort to bring a family to our community.**

A young couple, a family of three, has been suggested as a suitable match for us. He fled Iraq, fearing persecution due to his ethnicity. He lived in the Al-Tanf refugee camp until it was closed and he was transferred to El Hol camp where he now lives with his wife and their infant son. He has worked as a barber. She has no work experience, but has had slightly more education than he. Neither speaks English.

We are sending you this to give you the opportunity to be part of a united effort to bring a family to the Cedar-Ladysmith-Nanaimo area of the Island.

Refugee sponsorship is a one-year commitment and has three main facets. Approximately \$23,000 is required to support a family of three for their first year in Canada. A home (house or apartment) needs to be found and suitably furnished. In addition, the sponsors provide social support to assist the family as it integrates into life in Canada. In our case, the Nanaimo Multicultural Association and the Nanaimo Islamic Centre are willing to assist in providing some social support.

How can you help?

1. Financial contributions are essential; we are well on our way to the goal, but not there yet.
2. Assess your household surpluses for furnishings you may wish to donate. A “wish list” will soon be available.
3. Consider what “social support” you might provide. Tutoring, transportation to ESL classes and appointments, employment and child care are all ways of offering social support.
4. Stay informed. Contact one of the people below to be included in e-mail broadcasts.
5. Share this information with others.

** Cheques should be made out to Ladysmith First United Church, and clearly designated as “Refugee Fund.” If you wish a tax receipt, be sure to include your mailing address. There is an outdoor mail slot beside the back door of the church (232 High Street) which you may drop your envelope into.

If you have any questions or would like more information, contact:

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Together we give them hope; we can bring them home