

Tips for Keeping Your Sponsoring Community Informed

Refugee Sponsorship is a significant undertaking and is most effective when it is supported by the efforts of a community. While not all members of your sponsoring group (i.e. church, mosque, or synagogue congregation) will be able to be directly involved in the settlement and day-to-day support of the newcomers, it is important to maintain open lines of communication with congregation members, many of whom will have generously donated funds or in-kind donations to the sponsorship. Maintaining open lines of communication helps to build support for the sponsorship effort and counters possible conflict or misunderstandings.

Keep Your Sponsoring Group Informed and Engaged

Below are suggestions for keeping your group informed and engaged.

1. **Communicate regularly.** You can do this verbally at the end of a church service or during a community gathering. Or you can do this in print form in an e-newsletter. Be creative and don't wait for people to start asking: "How are things going with the refugees we are sponsoring?" Be proactive.
2. **Designate a committee spokesperson.** It is important to know who is responsible for reporting to the larger group and agree upon how often updates will happen. Without role clarity, communication can be dropped.
3. **Ask for help.** Although you have a refugee sponsorship committee, you can still make special requests for assistance with a specific task or need outside your committee. Don't feel you need to do it all—invite others in from time to time.
4. **Affirm any and all assistance.** A simple "thank you" goes a long way. Whether someone gives money, time, furniture, or something else, all efforts need to be affirmed and named.

Communicate With Your Sponsoring Group If It Doesn't Work Out

Things don't always work out the way we plan. Situations change and the unexpected happens. Regardless of what happens, keep your church informed. Below are a few suggestions:

1. **Less is more.** When you are working through tough times, it may not be helpful or appropriate to share all the details with your church. This is why there is a refugee sponsorship committee! However, it is important to keep communication open to minimize speculation and gossip.
2. **Be honest.** You should never feel the need to lie or mislead. *The entire church body* has committed to the journey, not only you. Tell the truth about what is happening and use your discretion about how much, how often, and with whom information is shared.

Plan for and Meet Opposition to Sponsorship¹⁰

Not everyone will be equally excited about sponsoring refugees. Whether due to differing political ideologies, understanding of fiscal responsibilities, or personal experience, sponsoring refugees can evoke varying emotions and responses. Below are a few suggestions:

1. **Be genuinely curious.** When we don't want to learn, understand, or see the viewpoint of another, we won't. Enter dialogue with an open mind and real desire to understand the viewpoints of others. Even more, enter conversations hoping for clarity and information that may challenge your ideas in a healthy way and encourage positive personal growth.
2. **Don't focus on "winning."** When we enter to win, the dialogue can quickly become polarized and move us to take sides. Open and honest dialogue is not about winning a fight: it is about hearing each other, respecting one another's viewpoints, and believing we can both move to a better place as a result of this interaction.

¹⁰ Adapted from the Do Justice blog "9 Tips for Entering and Sticking with Tough Dialogue"
<http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/crclistens-9-tips-entering-sticking-tough-dialogue>

3. **Talk less, listen more.** When we are passionate, especially when the person we are talking to is not as passionate as we might be, we can get excited and tend to talk faster and fill more of the time. This is normal. However, this can shut down the person we are with or make them defensive. Watch how much you talk and know you will learn more by listening. It often takes courage to share our passions. Work hard to invite people in; help them feel safe; ensure they know you are genuinely curious about their viewpoints. In other words, be quiet.
4. **Be gentle.** Talking about issues that we care about deeply is not easy. Keep in mind that each discussion is just a small piece of broader sharing that needs to happen; remember that sometimes it's okay to just scratch the surface; know that if the dialogue was respectful, seeds have been planted and there will be other opportunities to further our learning journeys.