

**ST. MADELEINE SOPHIE  
REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM  
BASIC INFORMATION (FAQs)**

**WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE SMS REFUGEE PROGRAM?**

The Mission is to provide hands-on service to refugees arriving in our area who have been forced to leave their countries to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. The group's ultimate goal is to work on resettlement of Syrian/Middle Eastern refugees in response to Pope Francis' call for parishes to "express the Gospel in concrete terms and take in a family of refugees." We will also serve refugees from other parts of the world.

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN (LEGAL) IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES?**

In 2015, the US accepted 1.3 million immigrants for entry into the United States. Of these, about 80,000, were refugees escaping political or economic repression or risk of death in their countries. The remaining immigrants come to the US for a variety of reasons: some are family members of citizens or previous immigrants; some of them are able to obtain gainful employment in the US; many are attracted by the positive image they have of the USA and want to become citizens.

**HOW MANY REFUGEES ARE THERE TODAY?**

The United Nations estimates that there are 60 million refugees and displaced persons worldwide. Many of these people live in refugee camps. The average stay in a refugee camp is 17 years.

**WHERE DO REFUGEES ACCEPTED FOR ENTRY INTO THE US COME FROM?**

According to the Pew Research Center, refugees recently entering the USA came from (in rank order): Burma, the Dem. Rep. of the Congo, Somalia, Iraq, Bhutan, Syria, and Iran.

**ARE THESE REFUGEES THE PEOPLE WE'VE SEEN OVERLOADING BOATS AND ESCAPING TO EUROPE?**

For the most part "No". Nearly all of the legal refugees entering the US have been living in refugee camps and have gone through a long process of applying to the UN for resettlement – some for the US but many for other countries. The UN runs them through an extensive vetting process. Those designated for resettlement in the US are then put through a detailed interview and investigative process including background checks by Homeland Security and the FBI. This overall vetting and investigatory process typically takes 2 years. Once the refugee or refugee family are accepted for entry, an agency of the US State Department arranges for their transportation to the USA and relocation to specific geographic regions within the US.

**WHEN WE TAKE IN THESE REFUGEES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, AREN'T WE EXPOSING OURSELVES TO TERRORISM?**

As indicated above, before acceptance, refugees go through a thorough, arduous investigatory process to determine their backgrounds and motivations for entering the US. Unfortunately, in any large population, there are apt to be a small number who end up drawn into and engaging in criminal behavior. However, we need to keep in mind our Christian and Biblical mission to serve the less fortunate including refugees. The US has a long history of accepting and helping refugees from other countries especially those in which we have been militarily engaged; and nearly all of these refugees have become valued, productive citizens. Most of us are the descendents of immigrants and refugees and are well aware of the injustice of blanket condemnations of ethnicities because of the actions of a few. Finally remember that the Holy Family was a refugee family.

### **WHAT TYPES OF WORK WILL VOLUNTEERS FROM SMS BE DOING?**

There is a wide range of volunteer activities: for example, greeting refugee families at the Airport and taking them to their apartments, helping them fill out government application forms, teaching them how to shop, introducing them to our transportation systems, providing transportation for appointments, social and cultural orientation, ESL assistance, preparing their apartments for occupancy, contributing household goods for their apartments, helping their children enroll in schools, etc., etc. It is our hope that the Parish will eventually be able to adopt a refugee family or families.

### **WHY ARE WE WORKING THROUGH AN AGENCY RATHER THAN DIRECTLY AS A PARISH?**

The US refugee program is a “top down” system starting with the US State Department. State works through 9 authorized nationwide service providers including World Relief, the International Rescue Committee, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the US Council of Catholic Bishops, etc. The US Government assigns refugees to these approved service providers who then become ultimately responsible for them including accomplishing some fairly large, involved tasks such as finding them housing and employment. The government does not assign refugees to individuals or individual church groups other than through the approved service providers.

### **WHY WILL OUR VOLUNTEERS BE WORKING FOR AN EPISCOPAL AGENCY?**

The Refugee Resettlement Office (RRO) of the Episcopal Migration Ministries is a well organized local program that has been in existence for 40 years. They handle about 250 refugees or refugee families per year. They have staff members who organize the various volunteer programs that provide direct “hands on” assistance to refugees. Other staff members work on securing housing and employment for the refugees.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle currently does not have a comparable, active, functioning refugee program and so is unable to provide meaningful “hands on” volunteer opportunities at this time.

Our committee investigated the various approved service providers operating in the Seattle area including the International Rescue Committee, Episcopal RRO, Lutheran Immigration Services, World Relief, and Jewish Family Services and determined that the Episcopal RRO program came closest to running a program that would fit our need for volunteer services. We also have experience working with the Episcopal Church on social justice programs, most notably the annual Congregations for the Homeless Programs.

The Archdiocese of Seattle recently assigned one of its assistant directors in the Office of Pastoral Care and Outreach to refugee ministries, and he is looking into organizing a program. If the Archdiocese is able to get a solid program up and running, we would certainly want to work with this program. The Archdiocese has encouraged our efforts to begin immediate work on refugee relief with existing programs.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO VOLUNTEER, PLEASE CONTACT GREG SCHULER  
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