

Dear members of constituent churches,

Greetings from Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. This letter is to explain some of the changes in MCC Ontario's Refugee Sponsorship Program. As you know, MCC's almost 100 year history is richly grounded in response to refugee issues. In fact, MCC played a leadership role in the 1970's in the development of Canada's Private Sponsorship Program which was developed at that time as a means to respond to the South-Asian crisis and what was then often referred to as "the Vietnamese Boat People". MCC and its constituent churches across Ontario have continued to respond to refugee resettlement needs through sponsorship since that time. As well, from time to time, MCC has worked with other community partners to foster private sponsorships to Ontario.

Since the fall of 2015 MCC has responded to an unparalleled interest in refugee sponsorship – from constituent churches and also from many community groups. Our program has grown from working with approximately 8 – 10 groups in a year to now working with close to 240 groups who are at various stages in the refugee sponsorship process. We have intentionally chosen to welcome others into this important ministry of hospitality. It is inspiring and humbling to witness the momentum and passion that is behind the growth in desire from constituency and compassionate Canadians who want to sponsor and help settle refugee newcomers who have no other durable solution. We have been blessed to witness God's hand at work in so much of this journey!

What was once a single-staff grass roots initiative at MCCO has grown to be a much more sophisticated and structured program. To manage the volume of demand and the increased risks involved, we have implemented many new procedures. When people who have been involved in refugee sponsorship with MCC over the years now approach us to once again engage in refugee sponsorship, they will experience a new program. They will notice a much more systematic and risk management approach that has been developed to manage and stream line the program. We believe that these new systems and processes are necessary to strengthen the program overall and we hope that you will understand them as positive changes in a growing and healthy ministry.

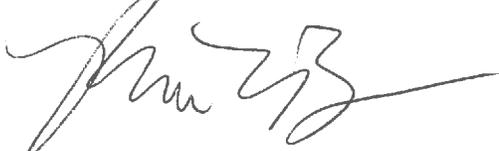
We continue to strongly believe that refugee sponsorship is an important tool in the toolbox of responses to the growing numbers of displaced people in the world today. However, we do realize its limits – especially in a system where the numbers of refugees permitted to come to Canada is capped. In fact, right now we have a waiting list of groups wanting to sponsor refugees and we have capped our intake of new groups. As we are not taking on new sponsorships groups, we are encouraging a slightly different approach to engagement on refugee issues:

- We encourage people to **get informed** about the complexity of refugee and migration issues. There are a number of excellent websites to help here
 - the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) and
 - the [Canadian Council for Refugees \(CCR\)](#) are two excellent places to start.

- We encourage people to **get involved** in the various [refugee supporting and settlement services](#) in their communities. We partner with many of these services in refugee resettlement and they are critical in the facilitation of successful settlement and integration of newcomers. Many of these agencies need more volunteer and community assistance.
- Another way to **get involved** is to support humanitarian aid and material resource efforts as we know that these supports can help people remain in their home communities. Check out [MCC's Material Resources](#) webpage.
- We encourage people to **get loud** through advocacy efforts that promote global peace and includes efforts to speak to the various powers that be about what can be done to address the root issues that causes of so many refugees in the world to flee their homes. Advocacy efforts can also include involvement around addressing climate changes as these issues also produce migration. There are several tool kits to assist with this work – [MCC Canada's Advocacy Tool Kit](#) and [Canadian Council for Refugee's Take Action](#) guide are two great places to start.
- And very importantly, we encourage people **to pray**. Pray for the growing numbers of refugees, migrants and displaced people around the world. Many face horrendously difficult decisions about whether to flee their homes and where to go. Pray for peace, the reduction of violence and the stabilization of global climates so that people can remain safely in their home communities.

We continue to invite and encourage our constituent churches to join with us in the ministry of responding to the needs of refugees in the world today. We believe that this is what God is calling us to do and we know that it is very rewarding work. The way in which we engage will change and the experience may be slightly different but we trust that God will continue to bless and multiply the results of these shifts in our refugee responses.

Yours in Christ,



Rick Cober Bauman
Executive Director



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Program Director