



Compassion Coalition

Ways to Connect with Refugees

“All the churches that have sponsored refugees have said it's been a wonderful, life-changing experience—not only to see someone else's culture, but to look at their own culture from a more objective perspective.”

~Pat Roney, Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship Services

Make a Difference Through Prayer

- Pray for peace, safety and a place to belong for the millions of refugees in the world.
- Thank God for the refugees and immigrants who have found their way to Knoxville, and for the unique gifts they bring to their new home.
- Ask God to protect recently arriving families who may be poor, isolated and vulnerable to exploitation.
- Pray for refugees' loved ones who have been left behind, sometimes in dangerous situations.
- Pray for families undergoing the stress of resettlement and cultural adjustment. May they find safety and friendship in their new community.
- Pray for the children of refugees and immigrants in Knoxville who often struggle with living between two cultures and a lack of acceptance in a predominantly Anglo society.
- Thank God for the churches and organizations serving refugees and immigrants, and pray for sustained resources and volunteers to continue their work.
- Pray that newcomers to our country who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ may have the opportunity to know his love and grace, through the caring witness of the church in Knoxville. Pray for the international churches ministering to people in their own language and culture.
- Pray that Christians of all languages and ethnicities in Knoxville would be truly one in Christ, so that we may be united in blessing the city as salt and light.

Make a Difference Through Your Life

- Make friends with someone who has arrived here from another country. Share your interests, activities and family life. A genuine cross-cultural friendship may call us to slow down and take time to understand and appreciate others beyond a surface level.
- When you cross paths with a newcomer to this country--such as the many who work in entry-level service jobs--be friendly and interested in their story. Counter a tendency to overlook (or look down on with suspicion) people whose accent or appearance marks them as a stranger to Knoxville culture.



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- Be aware that Muslim refugees and immigrants tend to have a stereotypical view of America, just as many Christians do of Muslims. Efforts to show genuine love and concern for our newly arrived guests help to break down those views. They need to meet Christians who genuinely care about them and their families.
- Donate furniture, linens, a vehicle, household items, grocery certificates, and other items to be used by a family making a new start with very few possessions.
- Donate a home computer (with translation software installed) to a refugee or immigrant family, and teach them how to use it. This can help students with school work and parents with job skills.
- Tutor non-English speaking children at a public school. Contact the English Language Learners program at Knox County Public Schools to connect with a school with this need (594-1760).
- For those who work in the dental profession: Many refugees have never been to a dentist. They would benefit from someone who can teach them about preventative dental care, and set them up with dental hygiene supplies.
- If you are a medical or mental health professional, or if you can provide much-needed help in the office, consider donating your services to help refugees and immigrants. Volunteer at the Free Medical Clinic (577-3733, www.freemedicalclinic.net). This clinic was founded by Dr. Tom Kim, a Korean immigrant, who serves in Knoxville with the goal of "repaying the debt to America for the gift of new life." (See "Dr. Kim's story.")

Make a Difference as a Family

- Volunteer together as a family for Bridge Refugee Services, Global Seeds, or other ministry serving refugees. Participate in one-time acts of service (such as bringing food to a newly arrived family), or make a longer-term commitment by "adopting" a refugee family. (See the ministry descriptions below for more information.)
- Have each family member make a list of all the things they have used in your home in a day. Reflect on what it would be like to have to leave all these things behind and flee to another country. Collect needed items to donate to a refugee family (contact Bridge Refugee Services, 540-1311, for a list of most-needed items).
- Invite a refugee family to your home for dinner (and be willing to go to theirs). Share your favorite food dishes, music, and family traditions. Lead an activity that children in both cultures can enjoy—kids are often the first to bridge the communication gap and make new friends.
- Dig deeper: As a family, learn about one of the countries from which many refugees in Knoxville are coming (e.g., Iraq, Burundi, Moldova, Vietnam, Burma and Liberia). Find out about the situation there causing people to flee to America. Look for ways to experience their culture within Knoxville: eat at a restaurant serving their native cuisine, visit a community center or church service that speaks their language,



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participate in cultural events, celebrate their holiday traditions. Pray together for the country and for its refugees. Have your children decorate "Welcome" signs for the next family arriving in Knoxville from this country.

Make a Difference Through Your Church

(Note: For more ideas and referrals relating specifically to Latino immigrants, see the chapter on Building Bridges with Latinos. For more suggestions relating specifically to international students, see the chapter on Higher Education.)

Build connections with foreign-born members of the community:

- Recognize World Refugee Day (June 20) with a sermon on hospitality and God's love for "the stranger" (Matthew 25:35) and prayers for refugees. Join with other churches or community groups to plan a special event that celebrates the talents of refugees with music, dance, artwork and food (www.usaforunhcr.org/worldrefday).
- Plan a Sunday School class or study group series on refugee issues. Become more aware of religious persecution and other human rights abuses around the world, and consider how your church can take action to support those who are persecuted and oppressed.
- Invite a refugee to speak at your church about their experiences.
- Plan a joint event with a church whose cultural heritage is different than yours. Share a worship experience, prayer service, fellowship meal, musical celebration, holiday festivity or community service project. Call Compassion Coalition (251-1591 x 2) if you are interested in building a cross cultural relationship. A list of international churches in the area is posted on the Compassion Coalition website.
- Provide space at your church for an international congregation, small group or ministry.
- Support Christian leaders within a refugee or immigrant population as they minister to the spiritual and social needs of their community, often as bi-vocational or unpaid pastors. Learn from these Christian leaders how to share the Gospel in culturally relevant and sensitive ways.
- Promote international awareness and cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Include culturally diverse elements in your church's worship and fellowship, such as music, artwork, and food. Bring the concerns of other nations into your prayer times.
- Connect with other churches and Christian organizations to organize an international ministry working group for shared outreach, prayer and training on concerns and opportunities related to refugees, immigrants and other internationals.

Support and strengthen refugee and immigrant families

Ways to Connect: An excerpt from Compassion Coalition's 3rd edition of the Salt & Light Guidebook



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- Offer your church as a host site for English language instruction, or help connect people with local ESL resources:
 - East Tennessee ESL Network (faith-based): 660-3592; download a schedule of ESL classes hosted by churches and ministries from <http://www.iface.org>
 - Pellissippi State ESL Classes: 539-7109, http://pstcc15.pstcc.edu/division_street/esl2.htm
 - Ross Learning Center (CAC): 544-5200, <http://www.knoxcac.org>
 - Friends of Literacy: 594-3673, <http://www.friendsofliteracy.org>
- Connect with one of the organizations listed below to host a conversational English group to allow people to practice their English while discussing topics of social, cultural or spiritual interest.
- Work with health care providers to sponsor a basic medical or dental care clinic serving immigrants and other low-income residents.
- Host a community garden on church property, where immigrant families can learn organic agricultural practices and grow fresh food. The Green Thumb Program (546-3500) donates seeds and plants to eligible gardeners.
- Identify people in the church who are willing to have a visit their workplace and learn about various occupational opportunities. Help connect immigrants with job training resources and employment opportunities.
- Offer the counseling services of your church to refugees, who have often experienced great trauma in their past as well as the stresses of cultural dislocation.
- Support ministries to strengthen refugee and immigrant families facing issues like separation or abuse. Reach out to immigrant families and invite them to participate in the family-supporting ministries of your church.
- Start a ministry with children from refugee and immigrant families. Help with schoolwork, provide meals, lead fun, safe social activities, and (if parents permit) teach kids about God's love for them.
- Develop a parenting support group to help foreign-born parents to know what to expect as parents in an American cultural context. For families from cultures that value the role of extended family, having to raise children apart from grandparents and other family members can be a struggle. Provide a surrogate extended "family" through the church.
- Sponsor a refugee family through Bridge (see below). This involves a group commitment of \$2,000 and about 250 hours over a 90-day period. Sponsors meet their family at the airport; set up an apartment with basic furniture and house wares; assist with finding employment; provide transportation until the refugees can drive or use the bus; and introduce the family to the community. Most importantly, sponsorship involves becoming friends. Two out of three refugees arriving in Knoxville have no church sponsor!



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- If becoming a church sponsor is not an option for your church at this time, partner with another church that is already an experienced sponsor, and provide a supportive role. Or set up a joint sponsorship along with another church to share the cost and commitment of the ministry.
- If your church has sponsored refugees, offer to speak to other churches about the experience in order to encourage more churches to get involved.

Make a Difference as a Volunteer

Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship Services: 540-1311, www.discoveret.org/refugees

Guides refugee families through the first six months of their new lives and provides services to ensure safe living conditions, adequate employment, access to medical care, successful cultural adjustments, and enrollment of children in school. In the last 20 years, Bridge has resettled over 1,500 families in East Tennessee.

- Answer phones at the office or assist the staff with clerical duties.
- Visit with refugees, and tutor adults and children in speaking English.
- Donations of gift cards from Wal-Mart, Target or grocery stores are always appreciated. Bus passes are especially needed to help refugees get to work and ESL classes.
- Pick up and deliver furniture to the refugees' apartments or to storage facilities.
- Provide transportation for errands and appointments, or teach the adults how to drive.
- Serve as a Case Management Assistant to help refugees with paperwork and other duties.
- Families: Organize recreational and cultural activities to familiarize refugee families with American culture. Enjoy the multi-cultural experience!
- Groups: Collect winter clothing and household items (such as bedding and cleaning supplies), and help families move in and set up their new homes.

East Tennessee ESL Network: 660-3592

A loose network that coordinates a monthly schedule of ESL classes hosted by evangelical churches and ministries, and that meets occasionally to share ideas and information. Download a schedule of ESL classes from www.iface.org.

Global Source for Education and Economic Development Strategies (Global SEEDS): 249-8058, <http://www.globalseeds.org>

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Empowers Muslim refugees to gain financial stability through vocational training and micro-loans, as they learn English and other culturally relevant skills. Offers internships and training for people seeking better cross-cultural understanding and ministry skills.

- Tutor refugees in English, or become a conversational partner to give practice in English skills.
- Drive newly arrived refugees to various appointments.
- Serve as a vocational coach to teach new job skills, or a cultural orientation partner to share outings and activities, and develop relationships of trust.
- Families: Refugees need relationships and opportunities to grow accustomed to America. Host a special meal or holiday celebration in your home or go together on outings.

How to Learn More

- Contact Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship Services (540-1311) to learn about community workshops on cultural sensitivity, and training opportunities for sponsors and English tutors.
- Global SEEDS (249-8058) offers an orientation to help understand the religion of Islam, and to suggest ways that Christians can love and connect with Muslims. Global SEEDS also provides volunteer training in cross-cultural ministry.
- The Tennessee Immigration & Refugee Rights Coalition (615-833-0384, <http://www.tnimmigrant.org>) provides information, resources and networking for refugees, immigrants and advocates throughout Tennessee to develop a unified voice, defend human rights, and create an atmosphere in which foreign-born residents are viewed as positive contributors to the state.