

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been working with refugees and migrants for almost 80 years. As people of faith called to welcome the stranger and the persecuted, **faith communities, including Disciples, play a vital role in helping to resettle and welcome individuals and families longing to begin anew.** This accompaniment is not a one-time event, but an ongoing expression of hospitality and encouragement as migrants and refugees establish a new home in a new land.

*Do not mistreat a foreigner; you know how it feels to be a foreigner, because you were once foreigners in Egypt.*

+ Exodus 23:9

*I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*

+ Matthew 25:35

Week of Compassion Immigrant and Refugee Response addresses the full scope of concerns and embodies our core values: connection, integrity, accompaniment. Ministries and regions across the life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are involved in this work. Alongside ecumenical partners, **Week of Compassion focuses on empowering the local church's response**, where those closest with a community provide the deepest connection and support.



## Ready to get started?

Refugees and asylum-seekers - families and individuals - stand a greater chance of settling well and thriving in their communities when surrounded by a trusted network of support. There are many ways Disciples can welcome, help, and empower these new neighbors. Week of Compassion is ready to help churches do just that, accompanying churches and refugees in that journey.

Whether your church is just considering refugee response, or has experience and would like additional connection, Week of Compassion is eager to serve alongside you.



# IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RESPONSE

how Disciples can respond in the United States



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## What is the process for refugees?

REFUGEES are persons who are outside their country of origin because of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). A select few are referred to the U.S. State Department, which interviews the refugees and works with volunteer agencies (such as Church World Service) to resettle them in communities across the country.

When refugees travel to their new locations, they receive services from the local Resettlement Office, which is connected to a volunteer agency. In most places, churches provide critical support as community sponsors for refugee individuals or families joining in their community.

## What is the process for asylum seekers?

An ASYLEE is a person who meets the definition of refugee in terms of fear of persecution, but is not yet officially recognized by the United Nations. An asylum seeker cannot make a claim for refuge before entering a country, but instead does so at a port of entry. An asylee's legal designation is later granted (or declined) based on U.S. immigration hearings. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

Because the statuses and individual situations of asylees vary so greatly, the support and responses needed from local congregations differ depending on geographic location, what local nonprofits are active in the area, and the legal options available for individuals seeking asylum.

## How can Disciples welcome immigrants and refugees into their communities?

### VOLUNTEERING

Many resettlement agencies and nonprofits that support refugees will welcome volunteers, whether it is a group helping out one afternoon at an agency, or an individual providing ongoing support alongside other volunteers in the community.

### WELCOME TEAMS

A short-term commitment offered by some resettlement agencies, Welcome Teams set up an apartment/house for refugees, greet them at the airport, cook a meal for their new neighbors, and make sure the home is stocked with groceries.

### CO-SPONSORING

Community sponsorship varies widely from place to place. In varying degrees, churches looking to engage in community sponsorship will help with financial resources, transportation, community involvement (enrolling students in school, helping set up a bank account, etc.), and general acclimation to the area for a period of no less than 90 days.

### GET CREATIVE!

Sometimes multiple churches team up to co-sponsor together! Churches find many ways to offer support to asylum-seekers and refugees in their communities.

## How can Week of Compassion connect your church to this work?

Right now, across the country, Disciples are transforming lives; scores of churches in nearly every region are involved in refugee response. Each response is unique, because the needs and possibilities vary between communities.

- Large and small churches are involved in resettlement.
- Rural churches have remote placement options.
- Urban and suburban churches create coalitions offering broader support in their part of the country.
- Ecumenical partners eagerly collaborate, finding ways to engage in resettlement together.

Faithful responses take shape from a variety of talent, financial, and commitment levels; it is just such faithfulness and variety that will meet the needs of the world. **There is a place for any Disciples church that wants to find a way to participate in immigrant and refugee response. Week of Compassion is here to help make it happen.**

*Everything we do ... it's to say **you are welcome here.** We want you to know you're part of our community. You are our neighbor, and we are happy you're here. It's not just about getting tasks done or providing needed supplies; there's always the opportunity to ask 'How are you?' and then to really listen for the answer. There are times I'm worn out and I call Alan [Dicken, Associate Director for Immigrant and Refugee Response], and he says, 'You can do it. We're here. **You've got the whole church behind you.**'*

+ Lily Cameron, Ashland Christian Church, Ashland VA

